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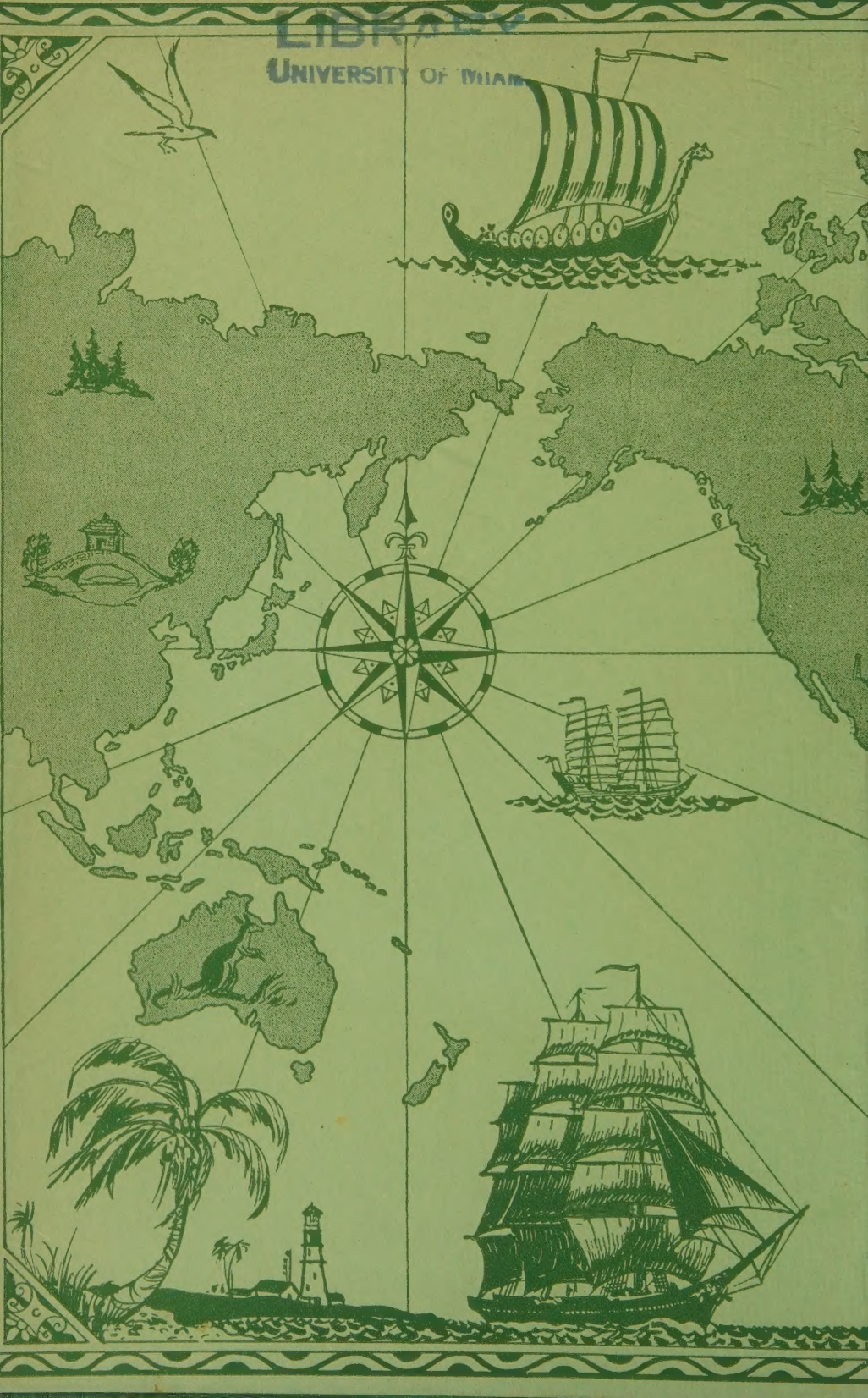

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WHERE STRANGE GODS CALL

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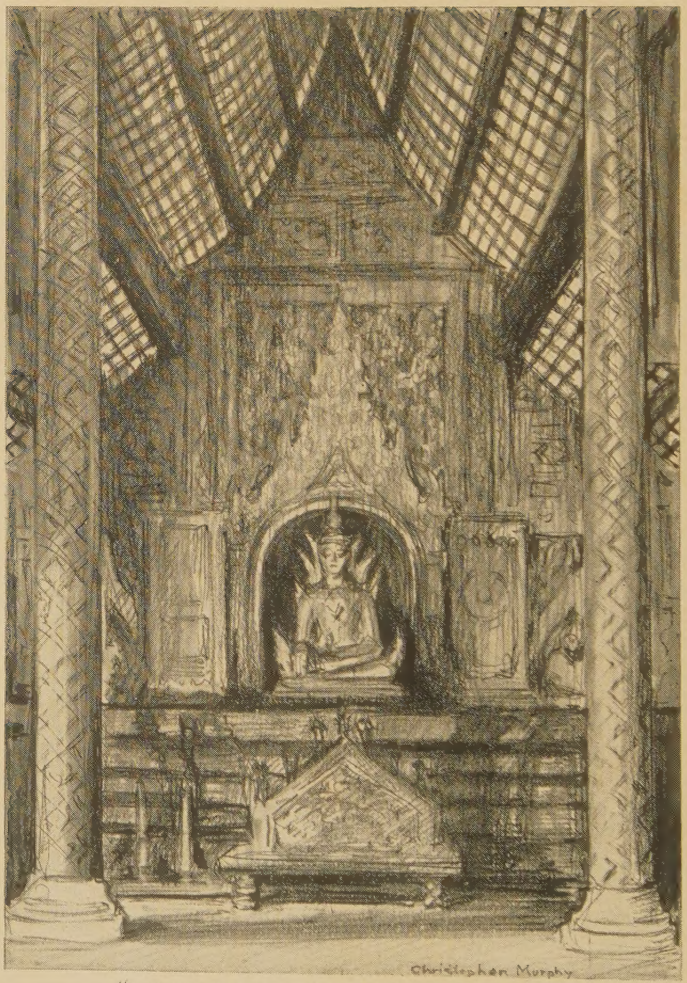

"SITTING IN GOLDEN SHRINES, CALLING . . ."

WHERE STRANGE GODS CALL

PAGES OUT OF THE EAST

BY

HARRY HERVEY

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
CHRISTOPHER MURPHY

GROSSET & DUNLAP *Publishers*
by arrangement with The Century Company

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For

Fred, Ann, Harriett, Kit and Leila

I unfold this peacock

fan of memory

46450

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WHERE STRANGE GODS CALL

WHERE STRANGE GODS CALL

EPISODE THE FIRST

MID-PACIFIC

1

THEY lie over the slope of the earth . . . Angkor . . . Penang . . . Zanzibar . . . towns whose names call to youth like the notes of a bugle. At sound of them a fever burns the blood, and to the ears (like the voice of a sweet delirium) comes the flapping of canvas and the hiss of foam or the scream of a sou'west gale in the rigging of some shameless wench of the seas. Or, more ominous, the beat of drums on some far savage isle. A few men hear and answer, following a jungle river to its source in mountain fastness or swampy savanna, or dwelling on a lonely coast where infrequently tall spars and royal yards break the monotonous sea-line; all urged by a common impulse, half sublime

in its grandiose egotism, half ironic in its illusoriness. The others, hearing the call but bound by circumstance, send their dreams after the more tangible fleets; and to them, for the moment, life becomes a sheer and breathless argosy, inflamed by fancies splendidly impossible.

2

I never knew her name. I could have learned it with slight effort. But I did n't want to know. To analyze a luxurious emotion is, sometimes, to find that it generated in or near the abdomen; and to give name to an individual who plays the rôle of jinnee in a gossamer encounter is to snare a dream in fact.

She may not have been beautiful nor even pretty. The hurricane-deck of a vessel, at night, will give glamour to any woman, no matter how unattractive. Particularly if she stands silhouetted against a pattern of stars and the black immensity of the sea. I knew that she was young: I could see the soft contour of her throat and one white shoulder. And Hawaii lay ahead. . . .

I moved toward her with assumed casualness and leaned upon the rail, wondering if she would understand the impulse that was urging me to

speak. The warm wind seemed to carry a subtle fragrance, a breath from the flower-mouthed siren Hawaii. It was a wind of Romance, a wind that savored of tropical coasts, that distilled a gentle ecstasy into the blood. . . . Finally I remarked upon it. A very pleasant voice informed me that she, too, was aware of the enchantment of that wind.

"It suggests Conrad," she said. "In fact, this is like one of Conrad's nights."

Indeed, she, at closer range, suggested one of Conrad's women; a tall, illusive creature of uncertain profile with a hint of fire in her dark, wind-blown hair. I thought of *Felicia Moorsom* of "The Planter of Malata," who could stir others without herself being stirred. And I wondered why I had n't seen this girl before; who she was; if she really was pretty; where she was going; whether or not I would not see her again.

We talked. About Conrad. About his books. About Romance.

"I 'm particularly fond of 'Lord Jim,' " she told me. "It reinforces my belief that, after all, romance is only an illusion—a rather pleasant illusion."

That sounded pessimistic coming from one so

young; and I knew by her voice, her manner, that she was young. I proceeded to tell her that she had a somber philosophy.

"It 's true nevertheless," she insisted. "Even in the Orient. I 've been there before, you know. Back home we hear of gorgeous-sounding Eastern towns and dream of all sorts of adventures that wait out there where, in reality, gaudy color hides lives as commonplace as ours. We forget that there, just as at home, people die with their thirst for adventure unquenched. . . . Depressing, is n't it?"

Very, I agreed; and, suddenly, she seemed a rather unpleasant person. I wanted to suggest that her disillusion was her own fault. But I did n't. I asked why she was going Eastward, what she expected to find if her present attitude persisted.

"Well," she answered frankly, and laughed, "I 'm going because I 'm tired of dancing—I 'm tired of parties, of bridge, and men." She paused; I remember that pause well. She had, consciously or not, a sense of the dramatic. "And as to what I 'll find: why, I 'll find what I found before: tombstones."

Her tone had an unpleasant selvage of conviction. The tombstones of Romance! For a

moment my faith in my own illusions was shaken. I felt vaguely frightened. But the night quickly reassured me; the wind, the spread of sea and the sky where fleecy galleons plied between the islands of the stars. No Romance! Absurd. It waited for me in the warm dusks, the chilly dawns. . . . Romance: the music of temple bells . . . of conches . . . of drums. Enchantment. I, as thousands of others (writers, painters, fools, and thieves!), had surrendered to the lure of the Blue Road (the road that plunges anywhere), not knowing why but drawn inexplicably. Now, standing beside this shadowy girl, lifted, so it seemed, into the blue realm of the stars, I knew the reason. I was seeking . . . a beautiful illusion? Perhaps. But what of that? One hunts the naked beauty of life, and finds it, not in the tangible always, but more often in vanishing horizons. What I sought was not cold, bare facts, not statistics or the banalities of export and trade, but more prismatic gleams to add to my bag of illusions. To stalk the rainbow. That was my purpose; and I saw it plainly. And if the rainbow melted before my eyes? Then I should go on believing it a spray of colored perfume, and enjoy the rôle of enchanted fool.

EPISODE THE SECOND

FIRE ISLAND

1

WE came within sight of Hilo, Island of Hawaii, about noon.

The atmosphere was sultry; gray clouds impended. But I could not be depressed. There was a luxury in the glazed green water, in the diffused radiance of the sunlight, that gave promise of tropical opulence. Men, looking for the first time upon some lovely woman, have felt the shackles of a new thraldom fastened upon them. And, immediately, Hilo bound my heart into flowery captivity. . . . I saw hills melting down from the clouds; saw countless coils of smoke unwinding as from a hundred craters. These, I found out later, were brush-fires. The smoke gave a gauzy unreality to the shore. Here, I thought, one can dream uninterrupted; and his dreams will be extravagant, voluptuous. Instantly I knew that if I should be moved to write in Hilo, my story would be of passion, a

torrid drama, savage as it was splendid. . . .

We moved into the half-moon bay, gliding over depths of limpid jade and trailing a little furrow of sheening spume. Behind the town of Hilo, rose Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa hazed by smoke; at the tip of a jutting point, Mokuola, or Cocoanut Island, lifted its shaggy crest above black volcanic sands. Pale houses drowsed in luxuriant palm-groves, seeming touched by the foamy lace-work that shuttled back and forth across the beach.

"Does n't look very lively," observed a little man at my side. "Wonder what the population is."

I did n't know, I said; and to myself I added that I did n't care.

"What 's the output of sugar-cane?" he pursued.

I did n't know that either.

"Hmm. How many square miles d' you reckon the island covers?"

I replied that it was probably as large as Borneo or New Zealand.

"Whew!" he exclaimed. "I guess they 've got a pretty active Chamber of Commerce and Board of Trade; and they 'll be havin' street-cars soon, I 'll bet."

"And subways," I added darkly.

He grinned, whether at what I said or as a preface to his next remark I never knew.

"Well, here we are in the land of shimmies and ukeleles. Now we can see a few hip-shakin' babies; what?"

That was the first beat of the drum. I heard more ominous grumbles later, in Honolulu, where the ceaseless throb-throb of white men's footsteps almost drowns the sweet melancholy of Polynesian songs. . . .

2

On the wharf—a great, roofed affair—Hawaiian boys were playing and singing, and girls were waiting with flower garlands, *leis*. As I walked down the gang-plank, feeling extremely tropical in stiff new whites, I realized, dimly, that at least one of my preconceived pictures was verified. The girls were dressed in stamped cotton garments, and as I passed I caught a breath of "Djer Kiss" or "Floramye" or whatever the popular brand happened to be at that time in Hilo. They were not beautiful, but they had a languorous grace, a laughing friendliness that was not unappealing. Yet how much lovelier they would have been had they worn native dress

—a twist of cloth about the waist, flowers in the hair. . . . The missionaries in Hawaii have done much good, but one thing, it seems to me, stands out as a dark scar. It is not good taste to cry out in print against a group who are conscientiously, if not constructively, following the instincts bred by several centuries of modest and overclothed civilization; but it cannot be overlooked that the missionaries are guilty of destroying beauty, and, what is more, destroying life. For it has been proved that the wearing of clothes has caused an increase of tuberculosis and pneumonia among the natives. If one has been used to swimming whenever he pleases, reasons the Kanaka, why should garments interfere? And if one has not been accustomed to drying himself after coming out, why bother about it now? Or remove his wet clothing? . . . But if Hawaii is to become a part of our republic I dare say it would be rather shocking to see naked skins. . . .

As soon as the passengers were ashore the majority rushed off to the volcano, Kilauea. In one automobile I saw my acquaintance, the little practicalist, and he beckoned to me, but I shook my head; I wanted to visit the volcano at night, and alone.

Under a shed, beyond the wharf, stood a train, a tiny oil-burning affair. Trains, as a rule, are anything but romantic, but, for some reason, this one invited. Or perhaps I was in the mood for a quixotic adventure. I had n't the faintest idea where it was going, but I knew that it could n't take me far. So I got aboard. And it proved to be a most whimsical train, obviously a tourist accommodation for the purpose of seeing certain parts of the island.

Before we started, a drove of globe-trotters swarmed in, wearing many *leis* and looking self-conscious but pleased. From my seat in the rear I regarded them with supercilious amusement. The conductor, a young Hawaiian, evidently shared my point of view, for he smiled and moved toward me with the air of one aware of something in common.

After pulling out of the shed the train followed the shore for some distance, skirting black rocks where waves fumed and frothed. Gray clouds were bellying down over Mauna Kea, the White Mountain; they looked as if they might release a torrent at any minute. Although I had no faith in the conductor's knowledge of the elements, nor was I at all curious about the matter, I asked him if he thought it would rain. He

was a pleasant-looking youth aquiline features and clear brown skin; and in his eyes was that melting darkness that gives the islanders a wistful, almost poignant expression.

It might rain, he replied in smooth English; Hilo had no small amount of "liquid sunshine."

It rather surprised me that he spoke so well, yet, I reflected, it was not strange that the dwellers on our Pacific frontier should have a considerable knowledge of English.

Hilo was his home? I inquired.

Yes. But he knew America—New York, Philadelphia, Washington. He had been with a troup of Hawaiian entertainers who toured the country.

"I liked it," he said, "but, well"—he shrugged and smiled—"that was before prohibition, and I got drunk in . . . oh, somewhere. After that I left the others and went to San Francisco alone. I did n't have any money, so I played in a cabaret for a while; then I took a boat for Honolulu. And now"—another shrug—"I 'm back again. . . ."

A simple story, a rather wistful story; and it is, with few exceptions, the story of the native who tries to learn the technique of civilization. This youth, "Kanaka nigger" in the vernacular,

had made his odyssey to the Land of Opportunity; and the streets where electric signs proclaim the superiority of this cigarette or that chewing-gum, where the clink of coins augments the symphony of progress, had been too complex; and so he had come back, the wiser by a few more vices, to languish in the caressing warmth of island sunshine. . . .

After we had passed the main part of the town—a sleepy place in spite of the few modern buildings—the train plunged into a swamp or backwater whose wild beauty fairly caught my breath. Here mangos, guavas and other tropical trees flung their tangled reflections upon dark pools, and lilies and plumaria distilled an exotic fragrance. Houses, some raised on poles, were built over rushes and miasmal scum. In nearly every doorway was a Japanese woman with a baby; Japanese fishermen stood thigh-deep in the water; and Japanese children played on the verandas. I glanced at them significantly, then at the young conductor. The faintest glimmer of resentment came into his eyes; passed. Or maybe it was my imagination.

"Oh, yes," he said in answer to my question, "they come as thick and fast as the 'liquid sun-

shine'; and, like the rain, they make things grow." He grinned. "Mostly Japanese children. Some of our women marry them, why I don't know, unless they think they will be taken care of. But not very many Hawaiian girls marry Japanese. The Japanese usually send for their own women."

"Do you dislike the Japanese?" I asked.

He only shrugged; a shrug that seemed to say, "Japanese, Chinese, white men; what difference?"

"But," he declared an instant later, "we would rather belong to America than to Japan."

Then, with a friendly smile, he moved along to collect tickets. . . .

The train had left the shore now and was rolling slowly through fields of sugar-cane. This particular train, like its surroundings, had a genial, accommodating air. It stopped at intervals for apparently no reason except to give an unhurried view of the scenery. And the scenery . . . rank, wild stretches. Great green gashes in the earth. Cool cañons feathered with ferns and palms and laced with waterfalls. Valleys where water-trucks carried cane racing through lush jungle to the sugar-mills. The sweet odor of sugar-cane saturated the air. In

any other place it would have been oppressive, sickening, but there it seemed a part of the atmosphere of luxury. It crawled into my mind and clung; still clings; and the heavy essence of it sinks the imagination into sensual warmth. Hilo . . . a place of silken looseness where the Trade-Wind seduces every thought . . . a woman, not immoral but amorous, who suggests without quenching the flame that she kindles. . . .

The train stopped beyond a tiny village and began to back. After much switching it retraced the tracks; rumbled over the shadowy gorges, past the cane-flumes and the town, and drew up under the shed where it started. My Hawaiian friend was standing on the platform when I got off.

"Are you going to stay in Hilo long?" he inquired.

I did n't know; why?

"I can tell you where you can see a good *hula* to-night," he announced, smiling.

"A real *hula* such as they used to dance?" I asked.

He shook his head. "Most of the old *hulas* are forgotten."

"Why is that?" I probed.

He shrugged. "Because the *haoles* would rather see a Hawaiian girl dance naked."

"Haoles?" I repeated.

"Yes, the white men." And he added, "Do you want to see the dance?"

I thanked him and told him that I thought Kilauea would be a more interesting adventure.

He shrugged again in true Polynesian fashion, and, with a friendly "Aloha!" moved off along the platform.

3

E Pele e! The milky way turns.
E Pele e! The night changes.
E Pele e! The red glow is on the island.
E Pele e! The red dawn breaks.
E pele e! Shadows are cast by the sunlight.
E Pele e! The sound of roaring is in your crater.
E pele e! The *uhi-uha* is in your crater.
E Pele e! Awake, arise, return.

Thus runs an old Hawaiian incantation, called "Hulihia ke au," and used by Hiiaka, goddess of lightning, to awaken Pele, goddess of fire, from the Long Sleep.

A great deal has been written about the volcano Kilauea, house of Pele; indeed, so much

that I approached it with almost indifference. I was, of course, curious to see the "greatest active volcano," but chiefly because of the legends that color its history and not from an ambitious desire to add it to the list of things "done" or through any interest in geology or seismology. Indeed, how the great masses of lava that groan in the bowels of Kilauea and Mokuaweoweo broke through the floor of the ocean and flung themselves above the sea did not challenge me at all; but the fact of their existence, mammoth blow-holes in the earth where a surf of fire throbs and beats, inflamed my fancy with extravagant pictures.

I motored from Hilo to Crater House, the hotel that hangs on the lip of Kilauea. Dusk was near when we left the town, and as we made the gradual ascent of Mauna Loa night dropped, cool as silk. It was not too late to enjoy the scenery; indeed, the gloom lent an indefinite quality that increased its beauty. Huge tree-ferns sprayed the sky, and sable valences—palms and ohia-trees—made a blurred pattern upon the mottled darkness of the jungle. Now and then the headlights discovered extraordinarily large white blossoms growing beside the road. The air grew cooler; my twill suit felt thin as paper,

and I sat there shivering until the lights of Crater House appeared ahead with a promise of relief.

I left my Japanese chauffeur sitting outside indifferent to the chill; and, in a dining-room that was but slightly warmer, I was served by a Japanese waitress, after which a Japanese "boy" brought me cigarettes, and a Japanese post-card vender tried to sell me lurid pictures of Kilauea. From the veranda of Crater House there is an excellent view of the crater, I am told, but that night I could see only a womb of darkness whose utter vacancy was more ominous than actual flame or boiling lava.

The road from the hotel to the fire-pit goes through a jungle that is amazing in that it is unexpected. As we raced past tree-fern and lehia I searched the gloom for a warning glow. But the only change was in the landscape: the trees fell away, and the headlights swept a road seamed with hardened lava. The air had become humid and lined with sulphurous gases. Frequently I glimpsed strange formations of rock. Steam unrolled from wide fissures, at times obscuring the road. For an interminable stretch we turned and twisted through that weird lava-forest; and always I was looking for the red glow. . . .

Suddenly the car jerked to a halt with an attenuated scream of brakes. I leaped up, or rather was flung up, expecting to crash into some smoky abyss or lava-cave. But I discovered that nothing disastrous threatened; it seems that Japanese chauffeurs usually stop in that manner.

On the left, lights hiccuped, obviously man-made lights. . . . A party of tourists in charge of reservation-guards. Two of these soldiers, armed with flash-lights, guided me to Ka-lua-Pele, the Pit of Pele. A layer of smoke swathed the face of the night like a gauze bandage; I, too, felt blindfolded. Suddenly one of the men gripped my arm.

"Walk easy; this ledge is cracked. . . ."

I experienced the agonized helplessness that cripples a human being when confronted by an emotion of the universe, a force of nature so tremendous that it strips him naked of his own meager sensations. I was led to the very edge, to what might have been the frontier of the world. Before me was the mile-wide crater of Kilauea, and, at my feet, its deepest pit, Hale-maumau, the Continuing House, or, as it is popularly known, the House of Everlasting Fire. I cannot say that I was actually disappointed;

certainly I had to readjust the picture that previously I had held. My feeling was that of one who expects a melodrama, and finds, instead, something less spectacular but more profoundly moving.

The crater was black as tar and, toward the middle, seemed to dissipate into baffling smoke. Red veins broke out on its invisible surface, quivering and crawling. I could hear a hissing and muffled roaring six hundred feet below. By leaning far out, in the grip of the guards, I was able to see the fire-pit, an orifice that swelled and sucked like the mouth of an inflamed devil-fish. As I looked, it smoldered and grew angry; it throbbed red with wrath and sank beneath smoke-billows; it tossed and heaved, an infernal surf.

"Mai ki po mai," say the natives when asked how long Pele has burned, which means, "From chaos until now."

Hell is an abstract thing; Halemaumau is an actuality. It antecedes history, and as you look at it you feel that it will append time. Promises of heaven and threats of purgatory wither, and the end of all is a dead planet, cold as the moon. . . .

4

Kilauea. What a history of legend and mythology! Here, according to native belief, lived Pele-honua-mea, goddess of fire, surrounded by *au-makuas* and *menehunes,* ghost gods and elves. At times, it is said, she appeared as a beautiful maiden in red lehia blossoms and maile leaves, and again as a terrifying creature, wrapped in smoke and flames. Many were her exploits. Behold this proof of her power and majesty:

It was in the time when the land of Kahaku flourished, before it was buried beneath lava-beds. Its sugar-cane and taro were luxuriant; the papaya-trees were golden with fruit; and the plumaria blossoms fermented the air into wine. Pele appeared during a *holua* race on the hills of Kahaku, and there two young chieftains saw her and became enamoured; for Pele had assumed a sheer bronzen body, and her eyes were soft and dark as a night-moth's wings. In the following days the two young chieftains each sought to win her, until her quick tempers, her sultry nature, made them suspicious, and rumors drifted to them that she was the flame-goddess from Hale-maumau. They became afraid and their ardor waned. Pele, observing this, grew angry. The

sugar-cane and taro began to wither, the papaya-trees drooped, and the perfume of the plumaria blossoms turned into noxious gases. The two young chieftains knew, then, that she was Pele, and they were terrified. And Pele, enraged, stamped her feet, and earthquakes shook Kahaku; smoke was in her breath, and her hair became a flaming cowl. From a lovely maiden she metamorphosed into a goddess of destruction. The chieftains fled toward the sea. Pele followed, carried on the burning stream that had broken from the crater of Halemaumau, that was burying the earth under molten rock and fire. On the beach was a canoe. The chieftains saw it; made for it. But Pele leaped from the rushing lava-river and caught the nearest. He fell at her touch, and a great mass of lava rose up about his body, petrifying it. The other chieftain died of fright, and he, too, was buried beneath a column of lava. . . . And they stand there to-day, on the island of Hawaii, Na Puu o Pele, the Hills of Pele.

5

More interesting than Pele, the goddess, is Kapiolani, the woman. Kapiolani, the Bending Arch of Heaven, was a queen who, converted by

the early missionaries, decided to put down the ancient superstitions surrounding Pele. She set out from Kona, so goes the story, against the advice of her court and friends, who all said that she would be destroyed. But Kapiolani had seen a vision. She journeyed to Mauna Loa, and there, near the crater of Kilauea, was met by a priestess of Pele who ordered her to turn back and who, when Kapiolani refused, cursed her. The splendid queen did not falter, not even when she reached Ka-lua-Pele and gazed below at that fiery sea crashing over black reefs of petrified lava. Who knows what fears bred by bondage to revengeful gods—the gods who had ruled so long—surged up at that moment as she stood on the brink of Halemaumau? . . . But Kapiolani descended to a ledge which at that time circled the pit just above the lake of fire; she ate berries consecrated to Pele; she tossed stones into the flames; and the strength of her God overcame the strength of Pele.

6

And so I sailed away from Hilo. I left it with regret, for it held fabulous possibilities. Warm, sweet trails through the cane-fields; waterfalls slender as swords; the haze over tropical

gardens in the morning; the drums of the surf pounding in blow-holes along the coast. What romances could be imposed upon a sumptuous screen like that and set to such passionate music! Yes, I left Hilo with regret. I wanted to linger in its voluptuous embrace; the promise of soft hours in tawny sunlight or on some dim veranda called to my youth. Hilo is, essentially, a place for the young. I should not like to age amid its luxuriance: the poignant silence would grow heavy, the surf-beat portentous; and I should hate the world for being young and myself for being old.

And so, to repeat, I sailed away from Hilo. Sailed over the great fire-rock in the Pacific where coral palaces are built on submerged volcanoes; and gray castles, sunk deep in blurred valleys, lift their hoary towers above drenched and swaying forests. Sailed past Maui, its peaks buried in the sky and its green slopes cool with shadows.

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EPISODE THE THIRD

THE BEAT OF DRUMS

1

THERE was something eminently spectacular about Honolulu as we approached it. The water was blue, a weakened indigo. Between the bay and the sky lay a rhythmical band of hills, brown as camel's hair. Over Awa the clouds were suffused with deep peach-bloom, as though that one spot had drawn all the color of the sunset; and toward Diamond Head dusk was thickening, hazing the great rock and shaping it into the semblance of a mailed monster—a dragon brooding over the harbor.

As we neared the docks Kanaka boys darted out in canoes and dived for coins. Lithe, sinuous fellows, these; their bodies flashing under the water like burnished flames. With the divers came a boat bearing musicians. I was prejudiced, and justly, against Hawaiian music, or rather what I thought was Hawaiian music. But I realized, that afternoon, that to appreciate

it, the real music of the islands, one must hear it in its native setting. In the stern of the boat that met us was a tall Hawaiian woman, an Amazonian creature whose voice rose in all its full richness to the deck of the big ship where I stood; and she sang a song that came to me with all the wistful yearning of an old love stealing back after long years of absence. *Na lei O Hawaii,* a Song of the Islands. . . . Whatever its words—I never learned them—its message is a story of wounded dreams. It is a song that only a Polynesian race could produce; and as I heard it, sung by that bronze Schumann-Heink, I felt that a perfume, heartbreakingly sweet, had drifted past.

The brilliant promise of the harbor was not fulfilled by the city itself. As I stepped ashore I was seized by friends, hung with flower-garlands, and rushed into a motor-car. A breathless hour of sight-seeing followed. . . . Streets of a business section that suggested New Orleans or some other Gulf Coast town. Cool, conventional avenues lined with trees. Scattered lights of the residential portion. All this dimmed by the dusk and reeling past like a swift film.

Shortly after nightfall I was deposited at a certain seaside hotel, where, in drenching silence,

I was able to recover from the hasty introduction to the amenities of Honolulu. My room was in a white cottage amid royal palms; outside, not many yards away, lay Waikiki Beach, a pale scar that curved through the gloom and vanished beyond the lights of the Moana Hotel. I could hear the croon of the waves; and the scent of night-blooming cereus floated in from the darkness. The sounds and the smells, the savor of enchantment that charged the atmosphere, were pleasantly intoxicating. That something preposterous would happen seemed a certainty: for how could such a night be sterile of adventure?

> . . . and she taught me language lessons
> On the beach at Waikiki!

Those frivolous lines danced through my brain; and I was most meticulous about my apparel, for I knew that my jinnee would not fail to conjure up some escapade as fanciful as cobwebs.

I found my way to the Moana Hotel—and to disillusion. In the court of that luxurious caravansary is an open-air café as brilliant as any along the Riviera. This night, colored lights hung from the branches of a great banian-tree

and on the veranda floated Chinese lanterns. The people at the tables presented a spectacle of cool, bare throats and cheeks soaked with powder, of glossy hair and tanned faces. From an orchestra rose and fell the cadenced measures of a popular jazz piece, and dancers swayed in a mist of organdie and chiffon. It was very languid and very acceptable; but it was n't Hawaiian, and I resented it.

As I entered I heard my name pronounced, and the Practicalist rose from a near-by table. It appeared that his jinnee had already rubbed the lamp with the result of a number of gossamer presences. Upon his invitation I joined the party, some of whom were *kamaainas* or pioneers of the islands.

"Do you see that old woman over there?" asked one lovely *kamaaina* soon after I sat down. "Well, she 's married, and she 's running after that young officer who 's with her."

And, a moment later, one of the party drew from his hip-pocket a dark and amorphous flask whose contents, he suggested quite inappropriately, might accelerate the conversation. And the orchestra played "A Song of Love"; and some one asked if I had seen "Rain" or read "Kimono." And toward the end of the evening,

when we strolled out on the pier, several silhouettes that were made up of two but looked like one did not separate, as they should have done, but remained defiantly undivided. . . .

Verily, I thought, Honolulu is a civilized city; and I went to bed at a distressingly late hour lamenting that fact.

2

The whites in Honolulu are divided into two classes generally speaking: *malihinis,* or newcomers, and *kamaainas,* or old-timers. Obviously, I belong to the former group, and my remarks, from the standpoint of the pioneer, are impertinent. *Malihinis* stay a few weeks or months and *think* they know Hawaii; *kamaainas* live there a lifetime and are *positive* they do. And often both are deluded, for the glimpse of one is too brief and the lengthy survey of the other too intimate. And so it is given to only a few artists, like Loti or Hearn, to absorb the true color and distil it into words. The rest, myself included, are voyagers who in passing catch certain pictures, authentic or not, to string on a thread with other memories and hawk them in the bazaars of print and paper.

Honolulu is a city of moods, all more or less

pleasant. But, like some young ladies of this exaggerated period, it has tendencies that, from a Victorian standpoint, must be regretted. The smell of cigarette smoke on feminine lips is not shocking; it is unromantic: and the smell of factory smoke in Honolulu produces the same reaction. It means the birth of Progress and the death of Beauty.

Walk along Fort or King Street, and you are in an atmosphere of commercial activity. Above, hangs a web of electric wires; precise rows of stores line the sidewalks; from underfoot rises the smell of hot asphalt. Moving languidly by, like a stream in a foundry-trough, is a tide of human metal—Americans, Japanese, Chinese, Hawaiians, Filipinos, Portuguese, Koreans, and half-castes. And you wonder what will come out of this melting-pot. Something strong as pig-iron surely; it will have none of the softness of the Hawaiian character; in fact, it will not be Hawaiian at all. . . . America, it must be admitted, has a way of assimilating her colonies, just as some Christian organizations assimilate human beings. She regulates them, gradually absorbs them; and the result, with a few minor local interpolations, is a Yankee city set down in the tropics.

Honolulu has more tender moods, moods warm with color. I like to remember the seaside hotel where I stayed; its grove of stately palms, its beach that ends in a blue-bright sea. And I like to remember the exalted greenness of Mount Tantalus. And the sea-gardens of Kaneohe. One of its moods that gives a sense of infinite repose is the Punch-bowl at night. The crater of a dead volcano. . . . Overhead, the ashes of day—stars in the unstained dark. Below, a toy city whose lights crawl into the sea. Solitude and mystery; and the perfume of night-blooming cereus which fills the great cone like wine. Up there, in the dark, one seems to stand in a tall house whose life has gone out and left it to the ghosts of passion. . . .

Another rich mood is the Pali, a great cliff that drops sheer into moist green valleys where, it is said, the specters of an army stir after dark. For it was here (as any guide-book or casual volume on Honolulu will tell you) that King Kamehameha drove his enemies over the precipice. It is not because of its thrilling history that I fancy it, but because of the mighty wind that comes plunging down the narrow defile behind it, a bold buccaneer of the elements that plucks at the pockets, that pirates many a filmy

handkerchief and goes laughing over the tremendous rocks, sweeping across pineapple and sugar plantations, to the sanctuary of the open sea.

And, then, the Aquarium. . . . Every one who writes of Honolulu devotes at least a line to it. But why not? A fanciful and challenging place. It stands in Kapiolani Park, and you approach it between royal palms, passing from brilliant sunshine into cool dusk. Or perhaps you enter some fabulous deep-sea palace; I am not sure which. But of one thing I am certain: the gorgeous fish that flash through the moist gloom are, esthetically speaking, the kings and princesses of the sea. Some are iridescent green, and some have scales of azure; others are a brilliant chrome yellow; or peacock blue with violet shadings. And they play back and forth in their glass castles like the sprays of a magic fountain.

Honolulu, city of inexplicable charm. . . . Something of a wench; a brown jade powdering her cheeks with white. Once a savage, now a courtezan, sly in the art of luring. . . . In the bright sun your warm breasts burn; and from your wind-stirred hair comes a sweetness as of bruised lilies. . . . O city of strange love-

liness, I can see you lifting your burnished body from the sea, and the vision brings life into the gray town where I write. Glendale—we shall call it that—Glendale, lying like a woman gently sleeping. . . . The Old Man of the town nursing his paunch and nightly extolling his virtues to an admiring circle; Beatrice screaming at her brats; Ellen in a widow's veil. . . . Glendale until the end of time—an old woman gently sleeping. . . . And you, you with a flower in your mouth and bruised flowers in your hair; I can hear your song, soft and low and husky; yes, even here in Glendale; a whisper, a sigh, a laugh; calling as you call a thousand others who have seen your loveliness. . . .

3

Until my last night in Honolulu I successfully evaded the *hula.* I eschewed it as carefully as a conscientious lover avoids some unpleasant characteristic in his inamorata. This was not the result of any delicacy of feeling or puritanical inhibition, but from a desire to escape the inevitable disillusion. However, Hawaii was not done with me, and through a chance acquaintance she gave me a last ironic slant.

When I saw the Practicalist coming toward me that night I sensed inexorable fate descending.

"Know just the place to see some real Hawaiian dancing!" he confided in a manner suggestive by innuendo. "Hot stuff! They 're havin' a *luau,* some sort of native feast, and the hip movement is special. Got all the dope from a friend who 's been there before. Want to join the party?"

This was the third time he had proposed entertainment of that order, and I felt that my reputation as a thoroughly masculine male was involved. And so . . . well . . .

I knew from the very start that it was going to be a sordid adventure, for our chariot was a Ford, and our driver a genially iniquitous individual full of suggestions for the evening's pleasure. And the quarter into which we penetrated did not contradict this premonition.

After passing several Japanese temples, we drew up before a gate in a narrow thoroughfare. In the yard was a long pavilion where tables were prepared for the *luau* or feast. In the old days, mats and ti-leaves were used instead of chairs and tables, but Hawaii, as well as the rest of the world, progresses. The food at these native banquets is *poi,* a starchy gruel, *limu,* or

seaweed, roast pig and chicken, raw fish and fruit. The *hula* is an inevitable innovation. In the past, I am told, the *hula* danced at the *luau* was quite fervid. As one guide-book conservatively remarks, "It has little to commend it to the refined person, and even the sensation-hunter is usually foredoomed to disappointment." Yet I should like to attend a real *luau,* not on Oahu but on some island less civilized; the thought conjures a picture of dark figures swaying against a background of brushwood fires, movements accelerated by the rising tempo of calabash-drums.

We entered a hall barn-like in its bareness. Opening upon it were two rooms, raised and accessible by means of steps. In these rooms were Hawaiian families, the women in *holokus,* which garments the missionaries, male and female, should be forced to wear as punishment for having perpetrated them upon the natives. Chairs and benches lined three walls. Behind my seat a window yielded a view of the pavilion where the feast was arrayed. I knew I was in for a display of vulgarity not even dignified by picturesque surroundings, but I comforted myself with the assurance that, at least, I was seeing the tourist-phase of Honolulu's night life.

We were the first in the hall, but soon a crowd of globe-trotters from a newly arrived tourist ship augmented our number. Shortly after that two Hawaiians—one a man and the other a woman in a peignoir of pink silk—entered and sang several songs to the lingering notes of a steel guitar. Then three Hawaiian boys seated themselves on mats and pounded calabash-drums. From one of the adjoining rooms the dancers appeared, announced by the lisp of bare feet and dry grass. They wore, in addition to the inevitable fiber skirts, yellow blouses, and paper *leis* about hair, neck, and ankles. A stranger troupe I have never seen: two fat Hawaiians, a white woman—driftwood thrown on the beach at Honolulu—and a girl who obviously was a half-caste. The last, a child not more than sixteen, instantly kindled my imagination. Her features were pale gold, were flawless; her eyes dark and sorrowful; and she moved with easy, gliding grace.

The first dance was the *uli-uli;* more of a chant than a dance. The women sat on the floor and struck at each other with rods of split bamboo, singing monotonously and swaying from the waist up. A group of Hawaiian youths, drawn into the hall by the cadenced chant, kept time

with their hands and made laughing remarks to the dancers.

Next came the "wild man dance." This was a solo done by a gray-haired fellow who carried feathered gourds and made grotesque, suggestive motions.

Following that was another dance by the women. It was as vulgar as any *danse-de-ventre* of the North African coast; it was the *hula* of the *luau* in all its wild abandon. I can imagine that in some dark palm-grove, by firelight, it would have a fierce, sensuous beauty; but there, in that barren hall, it was as repellent as naked vice. Indeed, it would have been a thing to forget but for the half-caste child. I found myself watching her and her only; marveling at her soft burnished beauty, at the almost sedate manner in which she went through the dance. She actually dignified it; seemed detached, oblivious of the fact that her slender young body was rippling and undulating in a fashion to rival the muscular motions of a cobra. Only once did her expression change, then to cast a somber smile at a lithe-limbed Kanaka boy who stood in the doorway; a smile that, to me, suggested a hundred romantic possibilities.

. . . Stolen meetings in velvet gloom made fragrant by plumaria blossoms or on some beach where the surf sang of tumultuous young passion. . . .

I was looking for a story; here was one. A half-caste dancer; a Kanaka boy; a furtive, solemn smile. Ingredients for a tale as sweet and haunting as sandalwood. And mystery, too. For why was she there, dancing that incredibly vulgar *hula* with two brown wenches and a damaged angel? I wondered; wondered also if she were really the illusive, wild creature that she seemed or a shameless little jade, hiding her coarseness beneath a soft smile. But that was of little consequence, for it came to me, as I watched, that she meant something more than mere grist for the literary mill. She was Hawaii dancing, dancing to the drums of civilization . . . a simple native trying to please, trying to learn a technique too complex . . . laughing . . . dying. It was, I realized, the thing that I had sensed when I talked with the young Hawaiian at Hilo, that I had almost grasped as I listened to the singer in the harbor. . . .

Throm, thrum-thrum . . . throm, thrum-thrum! Drums that beat like a million foot-

steps. They tell, not of the jungle, but of marching men. . . . White faces and tall smoke-towers and webs of steel. . . .

4

The next night, standing on the deck of an outgoing steamer, I watched the glow of Honolulu's lights contract to a sequined band. I had cast overboard the *lei* given me by a fair *waihine,* for, according to custom, one must do this or he will not return. But the perfume of its flowers remained, as mysteriously clinging and potent as the atmosphere of Hawaii itself. Often, even now, I smell those flowers; and I want to go back, go back before it is too late. For soon gray jungles of smoke-stacks will supplant the cool green forests; the song of the surf will be drowned in the uneven chant of mill and factory; and in the dark places where once the *hula* was danced will stand academies dedicated to an art of motion more eminently respectable.

EPISODE THE FOURTH

THE KINGDOM OF CLATTERING SHOES

FROM Honolulu to Yokohama, in mid-winter, is, figuratively, from the equator to the pole. . . . After crossing mountains of ice-blue water and furrowing through drifts of high-tossed spume, the steamer glided into Tokio Bay, under a frosty sunset, and I disembarked upon a quay where the wind struck at me with the sharpness of sleet. The Japanese on the dock—small, somberly clad men, military capes a-billow—seemed frozen into immobility; the coolies were blanched with chill. Beyond the immediate waterfront, lamps swam in the fluid dusk like icy pellets.

Japan . . . "Madame Chrysanthème!" . . . cherry-trees that flush with soft, gauzy blossoms! . . .

And then Japan, sedate as a medieval *oiran,* cunning as a geisha, took me by the hand and let me into her confidence.

That ride from the dock to the hotel is frozen

into my memory. The rickshaw coolie, after the manner of his kind, did not follow a direct route, but wove between uniform red brick buildings, in and out of narrow streets, and through a park drenched in mauve gloom. Those scenes, now, are like pictures preserved in ice: dim quarters where the air crackled with sharp reeks, where the bursts of light from shop and dwelling were weird as a solar carnival. All this set to a rhythmical accompaniment, a sound as of running water muffled by ice. Clogs! Wooden clogs! High wooden clogs! They slid and scraped along the streets, the combined clatter resolving into a subdued flow of sound. And the exotic people who wore them! No Polynesian languor here, not in this wintry empire. Swift figures hurrying through the dusk, buried in rondured cloaks; kimonoed shapes bent double against the wind; flying legs and ankles, all bare, and faces glimmery as hoar-frost. And *clatter, clatter clatter!* sang the wooden clogs. Music. The prelude to a symphony that murmured and swelled through fragmentary scenes; that even now whispers to me, a reminder of adventures beneath tall, stark pines and in houses and temples where hearts were warmer than the meager braziers that gave forth ghosts of heat.

EPISODE THE FIFTH

THE SILKEN DRAGON

1

YOSHIWARA. . . . There is a rustle of silk in the word, an amorous litheness. To more than half the world it means nothing; to the other group it is dimly identified with the courtezan quarter of Tokio. A third of this latter number know that within the inclosure of the Yoshiwara, or Shin Yoshiwara to use its full name, more than three thousand prostitutes are gathered together under government control; and a half of this small portion are acquainted with the customs that have made it a quarter of exotic evil for more than two centuries.

Yoshiwara. . . . Before I went to Japan I had a vivid, if not accurate, picture of it, derived from a certain novel that described it with dripping pigments. As a consequence of this book, I visualized the Yoshiwara, and Japan as well, as a place where tiny empresses of iniquity, robed in brocades stiff with gold crusting, glorified

with silks of peacock hues, and wearing high jeweled combs in extravagant coiffures, plied their trade with great pomp and ceremony. The Oiran Dochu, or Procession of the Courtezans, held each spring in the Yoshiwara, gave promise of abundant color; indeed, I could understand how a man would respond to such a lavish display when the cheapness of a street-walker would repel him; and, suddenly, I saw the Japanese courtezan as a silken dragon coiling about the empire and devouring its youth.

Soon after I arrived in Japan I satisfied my curiosity; and the results are not set down with a view to moralizing, but to embalm in print the iniquitous glories of a quarter that has been an institution in Tokio since 1617.

2

I had a letter of introduction to . . . I shall call him the Proprietor; and so when I was comfortably settled in the hotel at Yokohama, I presented it. He very courteously placed himself at my disposal; inquired if there was anything he could do for me.

"Yes," I replied "there's a dance I want to . . ."

I did n't finish, for I perceived that his smile had frozen.

"So you 've read that book, too!" he said acidly. "Everybody has! And because of it you tourists and writers come to Japan thinking it a string of island brothels! Japan! What does it mean to the average person about to visit it? The Yoshiwara, the Chonkina, Madame Butterfly, and the Yellow Peril! If you want . . ." Then he recovered himself. "You 'll have to excuse me," he apologized. "But you touched a raw spot. I 'm glad I got hold of you in time. You 've started on the wrong track. You must n't go back and write about that side of Japanese life. If you want to know something about *real* Japan, I 'll give you a card to a man who 's lived here nineteen years, and who published Lafcadio Hearn's books."

He scribbled a few lines on a visiting-card, adding:

"He 's here in the hotel; you can see him any time."

He must have read my mind as I thanked him and prepared to go, for he took a final shot:

"You can't see Chonkina anyhow; it 's against the law."

But, like all things forbidden legally, whether

in Japan or Timbuktu, the Chonkina may be seen—for a consideration.

Rumors had drifted to me of a certain so-called geisha-house where one could see anything, and so I set out in frosty gloom, behind a coolie who, with the wisdom gleaned from service chiefly to foreigners, did n't need to be told where to go. . . . And, by way of parenthesis, I should like to remark upon the practice among coolies and guides of importuning visitors to witness lewd sights. One encounters it from Honolulu to the Mediterranean, and even beyond; and it seems eloquent proof of the tastes of travelers in those lands. . . .

The house was in a lane where street-lamps floated in the semi-dark like ice-green bubbles. It had not the expected air of secretiveness, for the front was a checker-board of lighted windows. A slovenly Japanese maid admitted me and, when I started to remove my shoes, assured me that it was n't necessary. This was instant proof that it was not a first-class place, nor even second-rate.

I was led up-stairs and into a room vulgar and depressing. Immediately a swarm of butterflies descended upon me; old little butterflies with weathered wings, some in colored silks

and gold embroidery, others in figured cotton kimonos, all tawdry. Their tiny white faces, slashed with two narrow cuts that were eyes, were appalling. Their lips were like vermilion lacquer; their throats shading into yellow where the liquid powder thinned. They fluttered about and giggled and smoked cigarettes; toy courtezans, so absurd-looking that I could not associate them with viciousness.

Could they, I asked the *obasan* or female manager, do the Chonkina?

Titters followed this question; the *obasan* spoke to the butterflies in Japanese.

Yes; but it was very cold. However, for extra pay. . . .

I inquired the charge. Of course a staggering amount was named, and, as I had not advanced far in the school of haggling, I agreed to pay half of the original price.

In a hall below—a more pretentious apartment with clean rice-paper walls and matting—preparations were made for the dance. I was established on cushions in one end, with a thin-necked bottle of *sake* at my elbow; in the other, the *shoji,* or sliding screen, was pushed back, thus creating a stage where the butterflies, wings spread, took their places, giggling and chattering.

A more somber butterfly, indeed almost a moth, knelt with a *samisen* and ivory spatula.

"Chonkina . . . chon, chon kina . . . Nagasaki, Yokohama, Hakodate, hoi!"

The Chonkina, I was told before I went to Japan, was a dance similar to the game of "strip poker." It was done to the twanging of a *samisen* and the song "Chonkina"; and at the word "Hoi!" the music stopped and the dancers, who were making figures with their hands, held their posture. These figures were three. The two forefingers held rigid represented scissors; the hand held flat, fingers together, paper; and the folded fist, rock. According to the rules, scissors cut paper and paper wrapped rock; therefore rock lost—and forfeited one garment. This continued indefinitely. Or rather, definitely.

And that was what I saw in a more or less freely adopted form. . . . Butterflies? Yes, butterflies who, through some reversed medium of nature, cast off their wings, their soft envelop, and became caterpillars again, tiny white larvæ that wriggled and squirmed. . . .

"Chonkina . . . chon, chon kina . . . Nagasaki, Yokohama, Hakodate, hoi!"

When I left the house the mewling voices of

those etiolate courtezans followed me into the street; the frigid, wind-cloven street where the sharp green lamps seemed turned into cat's eyes and the *pad-pad* of the coolie's footsteps dropped like a velvet tread.

"Chon, chon kina . . ."

And I had called them toy courtezans!

. . . The next morning I presented my card of introduction to the man who had lived in Japan nineteen years; the Colonel. He was not really a colonel, in fact he bore the rank of captain, but he suggested that grandiose type of the Old South whose title is honorary and who is master of the art of conversation and mint juleps. The Colonel, however, did not produce a mint julep but an Alexander cocktail, a frothy, cream-colored drink that left a sense of cool white fire in the throat.

I opened conversation by expressing my admiration for Hearn; and the Colonel smiled.

" 'Cadio was a great writer," he said, reminiscently, "and shy, very shy. He did n't like to meet people or give his autograph. A queer fellow, a lovable fellow. And he knew Japan, he understood it. He did n't come here and write about only the vice. No indeed! Why . . ."

I thought it best to interrupt and inform him

that I intended to collect a few notes on the *keisei-matchi,* or courtezan-quarter; and I added that I had seen the Chonkina; told it in the tone of a confession. I expected an outburst; instead, the Colonel smiled omnisciently.

"I suppose you read *that* book?" he asked. "Well, the descriptions of the Yoshiwara are true, although the Oiran Dochu is no more. But we resent it; we don't like to have our vices advertised. And, after all, I 'm not so sure the system is bad." He paused; the omniscient smile returned. "So you saw Chonkina, eh? What was it like?"

When I had told him, he took on the air of one about to impart significant information, and leaned closer, shaking his finger at me.

"What you saw was n't Chonkina," he announced; "it was a corruption of the real thing. Chonkina, as it was originally conceived, was a game for children. They had certain signs that meant specific things. For instance, this"—forking his forefingers—"meant scissors; this, paper"—another gesture—"and so on; you know. It 's like a silly game I used to play called 'Simon says thumbs up.' The forfeit in Chonkina was some article of clothing, but the last garment was never removed. Well, some

brothel-mistress got on to the idea, and, knowing that tourists and sailors like to see indecent things, changed it from a game into a vicious dance. And so"—shaking his finger at me again—"when you write about the Chonkina, if you have the bad taste to do it, don't say that you 've seen the actual thing!"

And so. . . . What I saw was not the real Chonkina, but a vulgar imitation—or, rather, Chonkina, the child, grown up and thoroughly educated in iniquity; a somewhat pernicious lady who crawls and twists in my memory.

3

Although I did not meet Madame Hana-no-Hana (Madame Flower-of-Flowers) on my first visit to the Yoshiwara, I think of her always as a living synonym for the Nightless City. Indeed, that stately and aged courtezan is so typical that I am moved to betray her confidences. . . . You will remember, Madame Hana-no-Hana, that you exacted a promise not to trap your words in print? "Publicity is so vulgar," you said naïvely. Do you remember? "Those foreigners and their pledges!"—you say? Forgive me, O Flower-of-Flowers. I, as all men, betray

you. But I have hidden your name in a bouquet, Madame Hana-no-Hana. None shall know; not even when, in the somber twilight of your room, you give a last sigh—not of regret surely, you who have lived defiantly unrepentant—and you are borne out, down narrow little stairs and through the rear, to the Mu-en-dzuka. . . . Or perhaps you are there now, beneath a gray obelisk and gnarled e-no-ki trees. . . . God! what a dismal place, that Mu-en-dzuka. I went there, as you suggested, and from the snow underfoot rose the smell of dead leaves, of lush, feculent soil. . . . Let them visit the Mu-en-dzuka, they who would follow in your footsteps, Madame Hana-no-Hana; and perhaps they will turn from the *yukwaku* where "cherries of the night blossom luxuriantly" . . . perhaps . . .

I first visited the Yoshiwara in company with three of my countrymen, gentlemen bent on sight-seeing. We took a motor-car from the Imperial Hotel and were whirled through winter gloom to the *O-mon* or Great Gateway of the Shin Yoshiwara. There, at the entrance, stood a sentry-box, and it was the duty of the police to see that no prostitute left the *kuruwa*, or inclosure, without a permit; such permission being

given only to attend court or to visit sick relatives or in a similar emergency.

The Yoshiwara was not on the original site, which was Fukiya-cho, a tract of swampy land renamed Yoshiwara—Rush Moor or Moor of Good Luck—because of its location. The first keisei-matchi (translated freely to mean a "castle falling to ruin") was brought into existence in the third year of Genna (1617) by one Shogi Jineyman, a procurer who, pretending that his purpose was subversion of unlicensed prostitutes—"hell women" they were called—had all professionally immoral women placed within a *kuruwa* and himself appointed *keisei-matchi-namushi,* that is to say, director of the brothels. One of the first regulations of the Yoshiwara stated that "prostitutes are forbidden to wear clothes with gold and silver embroidery on them; they are to wear ordinary dyed stuffs." However, the order was soon rescinded or else the Government was lax in enforcing it; for there followed years when the "silken dragon" flourished, and her breath was hot on the throat of youth.

It is not strange that, with this history of shameless magnificence in mind, I found the

Yoshiwara . . . yes, disappointing. Its streets were uniform and well lighted, and a moving pattern of men shifted back and forth to the eternal *click-clack* of wooden clogs. These men were of all ages, the majority in black cape-coats, European clothes, and soft hats, but some few in the native *haori* and *hakama.* Weaving through this dark loom, and no less somber, were coolies in tight breeches and loose coats; police officers, looking over-important and rattling their sabers; and the usual venders and beggars to be found anywhere in the East.

The houses, I discovered, were by no means all brothels and tea-houses. There were public bath-houses, shops, confectionery stalls, and restaurants. The houses of the courtezans were, in most cases, three-storied affairs with balconies and lines of globe-lamps. In front of many of the places were wooden-barred inclosures, called *mise wo haru,* where, in spring and summer, it was the custom to exhibit the *Joro* (prostitutes) like gorgeous butterflies offered for sale. At the time of my visit, these cages contained pictures of the courtezans. The best houses, known as *O-mise,* did not advertise their women in this fashion, nor did they display them in the *mise wo haru.* There were three classes of brothels: the

above mentioned, then the *Chu-mise*, or second-rate, and the *Ko-mise,* or "small house." In front of most of them were box-offices, like those at theaters and cinemas, where sat a male attendant or the proprietor himself.

All was so orderly that I could not be appalled, not even when I forced myself to realize that there were, within the inclosure, more than three thousand prostitutes. Instead, I found myself contrasting it with American and European cities where courtezans, unrestricted, sell their laughter in all public places.

We went to an *O-mise,* or first-class house. A male attendant bowed us in and removed our shoes, then led the way up-stairs and to a gallery that overhung a courtyard. The house was built around this quadrangle, with the guest-rooms opening upon the veranda. A *shoji* was pushed back by a kimonoed maid, disclosing an immaculate apartment with painted screens and delicate mural decorations. The *obasan,* or "auntie" of the house, made her appearance, very modest in a gray kimono, and performed her duties as manager by seeing that we were seated on cushions around a low lacquered table and then ascertaining our needs.

A servant brought warm *sake* and rice cakes;

and while we waited for the courtezans, the *obasan* sat stirring the coals in the brazier and conversing upon such subjects as her limited English would permit.

Finally, a rice-paper shutter slid back, and into the room swept four very gorgeous creatures trailing padded trains. They wore rich kimonos weighted with heavy embroidery and of hues ranging from mist-gray to gamboge; in their high-coiled, glossy hair were flowers and combs of tortoise-shell. One, a woman tall for a Japanese and clothed in kindling magenta, with a purple undergarment, wore her *obi*—an elaborate black and silver sash—tied in front. This was the custom in the past to distinguish a courtezan from other women, but now it is done only out of respect for an old practice.

They bowed quite gravely, and the *obasan* introduced them. This was Miss Pomegranate; that was Miss Fragrant Cloud; the other Miss Pine-Tree; and the last . . . her name is immaterial, for immediately I called her the White Phenix. They bowed again, then knelt beside us, stately and unsmiling. The White Phenix —she of the kindling magenta—sank down at my side and, after a moment, favored me with a brief, inscrutable smile from cat-like eyes. In-

deed, she was a strange creature, in appearance half leopard and half doll. Her kimono, of the finest silk-crape, glowed with a deep, sultry magenta, as though dyed in blood and purple wine; a wicked, conquering hue that was consistent with her personality. There was, immediately perceptible, something savage and splendid about her, a look so fearlessly evil that I knew there was mixed blood under her yellowed ivory skin; a strain of Chinese, perhaps. Yet her face was doll-like and Japanese. Perhaps it was her eyes, rather heavy-lidded; or the nose, which was more aquiline than usual for a Japanese woman. Or perhaps it was the kimono, that sullen wine-blood silk in whose meshes the reflected light crawled and darted. It was an ominous hue, dark as Catawba pulps, grim as clotted blood. I could fancy a man committing murder under the spell of that color. . . . Indeed, here was a story—a weird psychological fragment. This leopard-doll of the Yoshiwara; a painter, a man with an artist's lust for color and the morals of a monk; this incongruous pair, and the conquering magenta. Ah, there was the title! "The Conquering Magenta." And the man would become intoxicated, inflamed by the wine-burn of that brutal magenta; it

would become so fired into his thoughts, into his being, that he would crave it as a drunkard craves alcohol. And the leopard-doll, on the other hand, should desire the man. Thus the nucleus of the plot, a queer, abnormal cross-pull. And the end? There would come a night when, almost yielding to the woman, he would become subject to the blood-clot undernote in the magenta—and slay her. . . .

I was singularly interested in this courtezan whom I called the White Phenix; interested in her not as a woman, but for what she suggested. I offered her a cigarette, and she accepted. Fruit was served, and she peeled a Satsuma orange for me. Her hands were long and slender, were pale as frost, and, through the *obasan,* I informed her that her fingers were like white tapers. This was good Japanese etiquette, and it seemed to please her, for she gave me another feline smile. She had a childish fold, this White Phenix; with the greatest interest she examined my cigarette-case, my scarf-pin, and a signet-ring that I wore. She also fancied my gray silk muffler, with the result that I had some difficulty in keeping it.

After a stilted conversation, translated by the

obasan, the White Phenix and the other courtezans rose.

"O chikai uchi," they said, meaning, "Please come again soon."

Then they bowed and filed out, their padded trains weaving along behind.

The *obasan* conducted us down-stairs, and, with smiles and bows, accepted the *sorbana,* or "all-around tip," bidding us:

"O-yasumi-nasai!"

We returned her "good night" and departed; and thus ended my first excursion into the Shin Yoshiwara.

4

On my second visit I met Madame Hana-no-Hana.

Our introduction came about through a Japanese friend who, knowing my purpose, offered to assist me in gathering impressions of the courtezan quarter.

"If you wish to know something of the daily life of a *Joro* in the Yoshiwara," he said, "I will take you to call on a woman who was once *O shoku kabu*—meaning, the proud beauty of the

house—but who, now that she is old, manages a first-class establishment in Kyo-matchi Number One. She can tell you all you wish to know. Her history is quite interesting; that is, it would be to you. She was at one time a lady of the Samurai—oh, you will find her accomplished and charming!—and for some reason, a lapse of virtue undoubtedly, she was sent to the Yoshiwara for a term of five years. Thus was her husband, a strict Samurai, cleared of the dishonor she had brought upon his house, and thus was she punished. That was not an unusual occurrence in those times. Shortly after she entered the brothel her husband died. When her term expired she was free to leave, but . . . well, perhaps she was in debt or perhaps she simply wished to stay. . . . She was a very famous courtezan when I was young, quite famous. But now"—he gestured—"she is forgotten, and very soon they will carry her to the Mu-en-dzuka, the prostitutes' cemetery."

And so we went to call on Madame Hana-no-Hana one late afternoon. The air was frosty, and a faded copper sun, eclipse-like in its dullness, declined in a smoke-gray sky. In the colorless, chilly sunset, with the damp wind promising rain, the Yoshiwara was as depressing as a

falsely beautiful woman seen for the first time without artificial charms. I found nothing but melancholy in the drab houses; in the few naked trees that, in spring, pattern the streets with soft pink petals.

At the house of Madame Hana-no-Hana my friend spoke in Japanese to the door attendant, and, after exchanging our shoes for *zoro*—straw sandals—we climbed into a world of paper walls and matting floors, no less frigid than the sphere we had forsaken. While we sat over braziers in vain attempt to warm our hands, a tiny maid went mincing along the adjacent gallery to apprise Madame Hana-no-Hana of our presence.

Very soon a stately old woman in clay-colored kimono appeared from behind the *shoji,* bowing and beaming upon my friend. As she smiled I saw that her teeth had been blackened; a rare sight now, for few women disfigure their teeth with *ahaguro* and powdered gall-nuts as was the custom in the past. In her gray robes, long and heavily padded around the bottom, with her wrinkled, aristocratic features and white-streaked hair, she looked like some tranquil dowager empress. Yet this was the famous courtezan, Madame Hana-no-Hana.

When I had been introduced, she invited us, in a manner imperial and charming, into her *zashiki,* or guest-room. It was like all Japanese rooms that I had seen, with the exception of a lacquered recess in the wall where, on two shelves, one lower than the other, were flowers and mysterious feminine requisites. By the closed rice-paper window was a dwarf tree in a black urn, and in one corner a screen delicately painted with plum-blossoms and a phenix flying downward.

"So," pronounced Madame Hana-no-Hana when polite formalities had been observed and a hint of my purpose dropped, "you are a writer, and you wish to know something about the Yoshiwara." She smiled, a benignant expression that closed her narrow eyes to slits. "I am afraid of writers. They set traps for stories; and when they catch one, they tie it up in words and show it to the world."

Her fluent English, her manner of speech, surprised me; but my friend told me, afterward, that she was quite a student and read novels in English as well as Japanese!

A maid brought tea and rice-cakes, inevitable in a Japanese household, and our hostess, sitting like some gracious old queen on her velvet

cushion, discoursed upon topics of current interest.

Presently she returned to the subject of my visit.

"What would you like to know?" she inquired.

Having been informed beforehand of the proper etiquette, I assured her that I had not come for the grossly material purpose of gathering notes on the Yoshiwara, but to meet one of whom I had heard so much; however, now that I was here, I should be interested to know some of the customs of the *oiran.*

Whereupon she smiled and rocked back and forth on her ancient knees. Slowly, and with delightful grace, she filled a bamboo pipe; lighted it. Her expression was introspective, and I wondered what dreams were brewing behind those narrow, faded eyes.

"I like you, *musuko-san,*" she announced suddenly and with flattering familiarity, using the Yoshiwara slang for "young man." "Yes, I think I shall tell you the story of Yamabuki. My life"—wrinkling her face into that benignant smile—"is uninteresting; but Yamabuki's—ah, it goes like a book; and it will show you how we live, we *oiran.* . . .

"Yamabuki means Yellow Rose, you under-

stand, and she was like her name, fresh and soft as a flower. Her honorable father was a man of little money but much pride, and when Yamabuki was no more than a child he entered into an agreement with a brothel-keeper for Yamabuki to serve as a *kamuro*—that means a page—to an *oiran.* This *oiran* was *O shoku kabu,* proud beauty of the house, and very learned; many clever men came to her, writers, wealthy merchants, and Samurai; and she read books and spoke two tongues other than her own. She was kind to Yamabuki and taught her much. And Yamabuki loved her *ane-joro,* as an *oiran* is called by her page. As Yamabuki grew older she showed evidence of becoming an accomplished courtezan, so her *ane-joro* taught her the banjo, the harp, the floral arrangement, the incense-burning, the tea-ceremonial, and other arts of the *oiran.* Finally the time arrived when Yamabuki became a *Shinzo."*

As Madame Hana-no-Hana talked she smoked placidly and now and then rocked back and forth on her bent limbs. She knew the art of a *raconteuse;* that had been part of her training. Her voice had a quaint inflection impossible to reproduce on paper; nor can I recall her exact

"I FOUND MYSELF MARVELING AT THE ALMOST SEDATE MANNER IN WHICH SHE WENT THROUGH THE DANCE . . ."

PROCESSION OF THE COURTEZANS

words, all the queer little idioms that made her story thrice charming.

"*Shinzo,*" she explained, "is applied to a ship newly launched. In the Yoshiwara we used to speak of it in connection with a *kamuro* who was graduated into the courtezan class. On the day that Yamabuki became a *Shinzo,* the house, according to custom, was decorated and presents of food were sent to adjacent brothels and tea-houses. Also gifts of wine-cups bearing her name and crest were distributed among friends. Yamabuki, dressed in a brocaded kimono and wearing a gold-cloth *obi,* her hair done in the Shimada style and ornamented with flowers and coral pins, paraded the streets with another *Shinzo.* Her father was called by the master of the house and in return for the original *hokonin shosho*—that means a certificate of hire—gave him a *baishu-shomon,* a certificate of sale. He also gave her father a certain amount agreed upon, called 'money for the body.' Yamabuki had, then, become a courtezan, and her name was entered as such in the Yoshiwara Saïken, the book in which is kept a record of every person in the quarter.

"Before long she was famed for her beauty

and accomplishments, and two years later, when Oiran Dochu occurred, she was permitted to enter that great procession as the representative of her house. Ah!"—and Madame Hana-no-Hana sighed—"that was a great day for the little Yellow Rose who had blossomed so luxuriantly! She was dressed in a kimono of purple and gold, and her *obi* was embroidered with scarlet and silver; jeweled pins and high combs were in her hair; her face was whitened with powder, her lips made to resemble vermilion flowers, and her finger- and toe-nails dyed pink. She walked on high black-lacquered clogs, and servants surrounded her, some clearing the way, others holding the tips of her fingers; and cherry-blossoms fell in a soft shower upon her. . . ."

Madame Hana-no-Hana paused. Her stately pose had melted, and she sat huddled on the cushion, dreaming the wickedly gorgeous dreams of her youth.

"It was on that day," she resumed, lost in recollections, "that a certain . . ." Her words tapered into meaningless sounds, and I stared at her, then at my friend. With a faint smile, he interrupted to inform her that she had lapsed into Japanese, and that, unfortunately, I could not understand. She smiled apologetically, and

made a sedate gesture. "I forget; I am growing old. . . . I was telling you that on that day a certain gentleman saw Yamabuki and felt his heart smitten as by a flame. He came to see her often, not at her house, but at a tea-house, a *hikite-jaya,* where such meetings were arranged —and still are. There, with geisha singing and geiko dancing, they spent many happy hours. Finally, he redeemed her; that is, he bought her out of the Yoshiwara. For a long while they lived in great joy, but after a few years . . . Ah, Yamabuki, she was a child of the quarter, one whose love is swift and sweet—but sharp sometimes, like a little fox—and her affection for her husband died to a tiny flame. There was another man, a friend of her husband. . . . You understand. . . . It is indelicate to speak of such things," she added naïvely.

"And so Yamabuki returned to the Yoshiwara. Her husband, who was outraged by her conduct, sent her back, for he could not understand that his Yellow Rose was simply a child of joy and not an evil woman. Once more Yamabuki became *O shoku kabu,* proud beauty of the house; and on spring days, in her high black-lacquered clogs, she would parade the streets with her *kamuro,* or at night, with an attendant who car-

ried a lantern with her name emblazoned upon it."

Her pipe had died, and gray ashes were scattered in the lap of her gray kimono. But she did not observe them; she was walking the streets again, in brocades and silks, "the proud beauty of the house" . . . How much, I wondered, was her own story?

Impertinently I asked, "But did she never return to her husband?"

Madame Hana-no-Hana, that gracious and faded courtezan, looked at me blankly, as one aroused from sleep, then came out of her abstraction, smiling.

"Oh, no, *musuko-san*. As a wife she wore dark kimonos, but as an *oiran* she dressed in robes of embroidered satin. And, anyway, he died."

But what, I ventured, of the friend of the husband?

"An affair of the hour," Madame Hana-no-Hana replied lightly, "as all of her loves had been; little butterflies that flew past and left a brief sweetness."

"And didn't she regret?" I persisted.

She gazed at me searchingly, cunningly. "How should I know, *musuko-san?* And yet,"

she added, "why should she regret? No, there was nothing to regret—except getting old. Oh, yes, she grew old, and very soon, like every *oiran;* wrinkles came into her face, and her touch was no longer warm. And she became a *Yarite,* mistress of the house, and wore gray. But she was not sorry, after all, for the days of the Oiran Dochu have passed. No more do the *oiran* parade the streets in the spring or go walking on summer nights with an attendant who carries a crested lantern; the Government has stopped all that. . . . You have come too late to see the Yoshiwara in its splendor; it is old, like myself, and wears gray."

A melancholy twilight had sifted into the room, like blue dust. Somewhere in the house a *samisen* was twanging, and its tuneless murmuring, muffled by rice-paper walls, seemed far away, as distant as Madame Hana-no-Hana's youth. And, suddenly, I felt sorry for the gray old courtezan who sat opposite me, that vain and unrepentant creature who lived in the memory of shameless youth. I wondered if she, too, felt the depression born of the winter dusk and the winnowing notes of the guitar; suddenly she straightened and knocked her pipe against the inside of the brazier.

"I have told you of the life of an *oiran,*" she concluded. "Of her end . . . if you would know her end, then go to the Mu-en-dzuka or any burial-grounds of the Yoshiwara. There you will find gray tombstones and ancient e-no-ki trees. And, if it happens to be winter, a strange smell will come up from the dead leaves and the moist soil. . . ."

And Madame Hana-no-Hana looked very solemn.

When we left she accompanied us to the door, a sedate figure in her clay-colored kimono and dark sash.

"Come again, *musuko-san,*" she said, wrinkling her face into that charming, motherly smile. "I like you."

Then she bowed and ascended the stairs, no doubt to return to that room filled with melancholy twilight and haunted by little ghosts of music.

5

And so I finish my notes on the "silken dragon." Of the *keisei-matchi* system I shall say little; I am not a moralist. Certainly, on the surface, the idea of concentrating vice looks ugly. Yet who shall say that it is more insidi-

ous than unlicensed prostitution? The average American or Englishman, with his reluctance publicly to recognize excess, feels that it is unflattering to have immorality stripped of filmy pretentions and regulated as a machine. It makes vice a business, robs it of its piquant flavor. Or, if he be particularly righteous, he is horrified at the candid depravity of a licensed quarter; while, on the other hand, if immorality is distributed over a community, he satisfies his sense of propriety with the excuse that unseen corruption is less vicious than brazen iniquity. . . .

"The *keisei-matchi,*" said a very intelligent Japanese with whom I discussed the question, "seems to us a satisfactory compromise with an unavoidable evil. There are, of course, individual cases of enforced prostitution and cruelty, but they are rare. A courtezan may leave at the expiration of her term provided she is not in debt, and at all times she can be redeemed by her parents or a guest. Besides restricting vice, the *keisei-matchi* is a net for criminals. The six licensed quarters of Tokio—the Yoshiwara, Susaki, Shinagawa, Shinguku, Itabashi, and Senju—are under police observation, and their books inspected and sealed at regular intervals. Each house must have a guest-book in which are

kept descriptions of those who frequent them, and any one remaining over-long, say a number of days, is reported to the authorities. . . ."

Now, my opinion— But I forget; I am not a moralist. What I saw was through uncritical eyes; and I found the Yoshiwara a somber quarter where human beings live an abnormal life in normal surroundings; a place of futile lusts and wounded hopes. It did not shock me, it depressed me; not the system, the purpose. It seemed an abattoir of dreams; not dreams of the individuals, of the women living within its walls or the men who come there, but of the world. It left the feeling that Civilization had failed, that Religion had failed; and it made false the illusions and fancies of my youth; dreams of spring when young men made love and the air swooned with the sweetness of blossoming earth. In the face of it, or of any such quarter in any country, mating loses its candor and marriage becomes a useless and ineffectual formality.

EPISODE THE SIXTH

SHINTO: THE WAY OF THE GODS

1

LIFTED high above the toy cities of Japan, as befitting the shrine of a cult lofty and chaste, is Nikko, the antechamber to the Way of the Gods. In the tall cryptomerias, mighty as the redwoods of the West, whisper the ghosts of departed ancestors; their spirits mingle with the misty fume of mountain cataracts; below placid lakes, in the many-chambered palaces that lie hidden in drowned rushes, dwell souls that, on dark nights, rise in foggy shrouds; and through cold temple glooms, where coffined in vermilion and gold lie the ashes of the East-Illuminating Incarnation of Bodhisattva, roam the specters of generations gone. It is the holy of holies of Shintoism; and it formed, for me, the background of an adventure purely emotional.

I left Ueno Station, Tokio, in the early afternoon, and climbed past fields of succulent green, past thickening forests and miniature villages,

past Lake Chuzenji, to the Nikko-zan range. It was an initiation into a new Japan, a region of formidable ruggedness—the source from which the people must draw the warrior nature that lies beneath their doll-faces. I realized, suddenly, that I had felt cramped in Yokohama and Tokio, and I expanded luxuriously, absorbing the vista of cool rolling distances and wooded ranges.

Night had fallen when we reached Nikko, a night made pallid by sifted flakes that came drifting down from a starless sky. The frigid air seemed to bite at my skin, and I relinquished the romance of a rickshaw for the warm comfort of a motor-car. That ride was typical, an etching of winter Japan: the glow of queer lanterns seen through swimming flakes or a reflection flung on some icy pool; lighted windows and doorways, muffled figures; all glimpsed in the flurrying pallor.

At the hotel, on a hill outside the main town, a ruddy-cheeked boy, healthier-looking than the ivory-skinned youths of the low country, carried my bag to a warm, immaculate room, the only properly heated room I had while in Japan. A quaint little *musumé,* wearing a ridiculously elaborate coiffure, opened my bed and placed

a clean striped kimono, neatly folded, on the heavy quilts. Then with a smiling "O-yasumi-nasai!" she went pattering down the hall in her loose straw sandals.

The gentle snow had ceased, and from my window I could see near-by rondures, hills, and flake-powdered trees, white as the mosque of Hedjaz. Indeed, I felt as though I were looking upon some blanched North African city whose domes and minarets were half smothered in darkness. Down there in that frosty gloom, I knew, was the famous Red Lacquer Bridge; and I fancied I could hear the muffled rush and gurgle of a stream.

I went to sleep buried deep under many quilts and gazing at the luxury of russet coals in the open stove.

2

My quaint *musumé* of the night before awakened me with a smiling "Ohayo!" and the rattle of charcoal as she built a fire on the cold clinkers. Clear, crisp sunlight revealed the mosques of Hedjaz to be cone-shaped, dripping trees and hills powdered white and flanked with gray where the snow had melted. There was a

tug and a call in the morning, a clean, cold promise of spotless beauty.

I went below, past smiling, bowing *musumés,* and consumed an abnormal amount of food; then, bundled in a rough hair-rug, rattled cautiously down the steep driveway, guided by two *kurumaya,* or rickshaw-men, one in the shafts and the other behind.

At the foot of the roadway were bazaars, and, several hundred yards to the north, the Nikko-bashi, spanning the Daiyagawa. As we approached the river I beheld the Red Lacquer Bridge, a very ordinary affair that did not appear to be lacquered but only painted. It seemed to me a most inauspicious-looking structure to be so drenched in legendary history; for it was here that Saint Shodo-Shonin miraculously crossed the stream on two serpents; and the bridge was built to commemorate the act; a bridge so holy that only imperial personages dare use it. Why Saint Shodo-Shonin needed anything to cross the Daiyagawa I could not understand, for it rippled along over a shallow bed, fussing about rocks and winding between artificial banks of stone. But I could not be disillusioned, for it was a morning when the crystal

air, the friendly mountains and woods told me it was thrilling to be young.

The road turned left from the Nikko-bashi and plunged between great folds of earth, following the course of the Daiyagawa for some distance, then, always within sight of far, smoke-blue mountains, twisted into thin forests of evergreens and through outlying hamlets. The people in these villages had a russet tinge under their bronze complexions, and they seemed hardier, more dependable than the dwellers along the coast. Coolies passed, drawing carts, some in loose jackets, with rags about their heads, others in straw coats and huge mushroom hats, all stocky and somber, the muscles of their bare legs knotting and crawling as they moved. The girls were not as attractive as the porcelain-like *musumés* of the lowlands; they were heavier, and cold winds in winter and outdoor work in summer had marked them. Yet I liked them, those russet-bronze mountaineers; they looked sincere and sturdy, and, obviously, were without the subtle complexities that characterize city folk.

Soon we entered a kingdom of cryptomeria-trees, great, towering monarchs whose crests drank in the rare sunlight above pygmy earth

and whose roots writhed deep in snow-drenched soil. I was deposited at the bottom of a flight of gray stone steps at the top of which rose a granite torii, sufficiently huge to be consistent with the immensity of the natural surroundings. In this mammoth world I felt dwarfed, and my buoyancy ebbed.

Climbing the stair between green giants, I found myself in a sort of open court packed with crusted snow. A path had been cleared and made its way past a five-storied pagoda to more steps. The lyrical, upcurling eaves of the pagoda were padded with white; and a frosty coating, thin as isinglass, gave a pale shimmer to its carved entablatures and lacquered projections. Its fang-like gables, its curving corrugated roofs and figured architraves were typical of the curling, fantastic style of architecture found from Burma to the Nippon Archipelago; a style that must be the result of curling, fantastic ways of thinking.

I followed the snow-seamed flagstones to the steps, then mounted to the Omote-mon, or Gateway of the Deva Kings, an elaborate copper-roofed affair with perforated carvings. Beyond, was another courtyard, and, half-seen through a lace-work of evergreens, the gate of

the Iyeyasu Temple, the shrine dedicated to the founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate, Iyeyasu Tokugawa, canonized Tosho-gongen, or the East-Illuminating Incarnation of Bodhisattva. In this inclosure was a bewildering number of stone lanterns and small storehouses, topped by a belfry and a drum-tower that strove vainly toward the unattainable cryptomerias.

This gradual rise to the main shrine was extremely effective, and I felt like a pilgrim soul filtering up through a succession of planes to the penetralia.

In the courtyard were several pilgrims who, having descended from the shrine, had paused to gaze about at the extravagant stonework. They stared at me, as Japanese stare at all foreigners; but I did not resent it, for the lofty spectacle of monster trees and monuments, all drowned in an immense, cold stillness, had pervaded me with a calm that could not be broken. Passing under a bronze torii bearing the Tokugawa medallions, I climbed the last steps, prepared for whatever arcana I was about to explore.

The Yomi-mon, auspicious gateway of the temple, instantly intoxicated my vision with a gorgeous excess of color. For the next half-hour, as I wandered through myriad sacred halls,

I was a drunkard, inflamed by rich vermilions, extravagant greens, and old golds dark as rust and mottled with verdigris. I remember columns glistening with vermilion, façades fretted with gold, cusped gables of bronze, and bluish roofs that curved with exquisite rhythm. Outside, in sharp winter sunlight, were panels carved and painted, picturing dragons, lions, cranes, pheasants, and fabulous green phenixes. Within, in chill temple twilight, were delicate mural decorations, rows of chrysanthemums, peonies, and lotus-flowers. . . .

I found my way through the innermost gate, past black pillars and gold-leaf trellises, and up the metaled steps into the Oratory. It was sheathed in cold gloom, in silence that was unbroken as I moved, stocking-shod, upon the matting. The arabesques, the carvings and coffered ceiling had a sharp loveliness, intensified to the vision by the frigid air. A paved gallery connected with the shrine. Here a nacreous altar, reflecting the intruding sunlight, burned the icy dusk; and behind the chancel-rail were silver vases and gold-lacquer drums whose warmth of color seemed to thaw the arctic atmosphere.

On a cushion at one side of the doorway sat a priest. His white garments, his somber miter,

were incongruous in the midst of such cardinal opulence. I perceived that he was young, even handsome; and sharp regret smote me, an inevitable emotion when I see youth cassocked and cowled. What had drawn him into that unnatural life, I wondered; dreams of glory beyond death, that meager hope of immortality that often forces men to relinquish a sure brief span for uncertain eternity? Or was it an act of penitence, expiation for some folly? In his clear, unusually wide eyes was no glimmer of a spirit pledged to self-abnegation, nor was there a trace of that fanatical fire that makes monks of men. He was, with his priest's robes and contrasting youthful, worldly appearance, as complex as the religion he represented.

Shintoism, or the Way of the Gods, is a primitive cult whose chief deity is the sun-goddess, Amaterasu-Omikami. From her is Jimmu-Tenno, the first emperor, supposed to have descended. Other gods and goddesses are the Sea, the River, the Wind, the Mountains and Fire; also certain warriors and servants of the imperial house are included. It is a combination of nature-worship and ancestor-worship; in short, an *agnostic religion.* While in principle similar to the ancient phallic religion, the actual deifi-

cation of sex-organs is absent. Its God is Body; or, rather, the elements of earth and the memory of the dead, the former being the source and the latter its ultimate abstract form. Its object is purification—and patriotism; a most satisfactory combination for government as well as people. . . .

As I moved toward the doorway, reluctant to leave without having analyzed the young monk, he caught my gaze and smiled. It was my cue, and I said "good morning" in Japanese. Still smiling, he informed me that he spoke English.

"You like temple?" he asked, with a gesture. I told him yes, and he nodded. "Ver' beautiful. But mos' 'Merican men don' like; they jus' like business. . . . Oh, yes, ver' many tourists come here; tourist ladies, too. Some nice, others not like to take off shoes. They say, 'Shinto God not our God; we no take off shoes.' "

I agreed with him that this was quite reprehensible. . . . In the matter of respect, when it comes to visiting the holy places of other religions, the white race can take lessons in deportment from Asiatics.

"But mos' ladies ver' nice," he resumed. "I

like 'Merican ladies. But I not tell my wife that; she want to dress 'Merican way if she know, an' that not good for Japanese girl."

His wife! . . .

"Yes, Shinto priest marry if he want," he said when I impolitely expressed surprise that he had a wife. "Not like Buddhist priest; much better."

A monk who was neither an ascetic nor a celibate! . . . Suddenly, as I looked down at the simple-robed, mitered figure, at the healthy young face, I felt that Shintoism, which had always seemed a most involved cult, was simplified, and, at the same time, invested with a complexity that I would never fully understand.

Somewhat bewildered, I placed an offering in the bowl at his side and moved out into the clear, cold sunshine.

3

At the end of a long open corridor leading from the main shrine was a gateway, beyond which were stairs ascending to Iyeyasu's tomb. Up I went; up and up, into the very tops of the colossal cryptomerias. Over the gray balustrade, seen below, were a fleet of curled roofs afloat on the lavish greenery like some fantastic

armada. Ahead, at the top of the last flight, rose a bronze torii.

Finally, an ache at the back of my knees, I finished the climb. Looking behind, I could see the paved approach curving down through the deep green of foliage and the dazzling pallor of snow. Two hundred steps! And now I stood on the summit, no longer cold but perspiring, and bathed in a translucent green radiance diffused by the sunlight that stole into the leafy tower. In the profound silence, seeming intensified by that twilight the color of undersea gloom, I felt foreign, a strange, tiny creature caught in a gigantic emerald.

At the back of the inclosing wall, behind a shrine where an aged priest sat muttering, was the mausoleum. But it did not call; I was interested in the exalted stillness, in the green-wine atmosphere and the leafy contours that melted down to the temple grounds, there to dissolve into a verdant lagoon. The tremendous, chaste beauty smote me, sharp as unanswered love. It left me aching with the realization of human imperfections. It was a cruel beauty, too intolerant to be endured for long, for it scaled above men, dwarfing their dreams and leaving

a mournful consciousness of the futility of living.

I sat down, submerging myself in the spectacle. I felt absorbed instantly. I was no longer an individual but part of a stupendous scheme. I could not even resent the sapping up of my personality. What a frigid and melancholy place! I thought; a fitting tabernacle for a religion without frenzy. The snowy slopes, the mammoth trees, and the cold, beautiful shrines were sources of passionless fatalism, of unquestioning obedience to the will of dead men. Shintoism seemed the only plausible result of such surroundings.

Soon the warmth kindled by exertion gave away to a chill rising from the stones where I sat; the smell of snow was sharp in my nostrils; and, with a last look at that vista of unattainable magnificence, I moved down the damp, gray steps.

. . . Nikko, like Hilo, is a place in which to linger. It gives promise of pure silences that dwell over fuming cataracts, over pilgrim trails through sempiternal forests, and over mountains whose icy slopes flash like mailed flanks. But, unlike Hilo, its gifts are dreams splendid and saintly.

4

When I reached the temple gallery I noticed, on the right, a roofed stage set back from the walk. I had observed it before my pilgrimage to Iyeyasu's mausoleum, but it was empty then. Now it was occupied by a priestess robed in spotless white and scarlet, and sitting behind a table cluttered with votive offerings. Her face, beneath a wide starched coiffe, was colorless with rice-powder, and she sat motionless, staring beyond me with the introspective gaze of a seer. She was, I knew, one of an order of priestesses attached to some Shinto temples, and the platform where she sat was the *kagura-den,* or sacred dancing-stage. I was startled at coming so suddenly upon this ascetic figure. Surely it was a pose, I thought, remembering the young priest. Yet as I looked at the pallid face, beautiful in its absolute immobility, at the dreaming eyes, remarkably wide for a Japanese, I could not doubt the sincerity of her detachment.

I placed a coin in the bowl in front of her, and at the clinking sound she focused her gaze upon me for the first time. She bowed, superbly dignified, touching the floor with her forehead; then, slowly, she rose. In one hand she held a gold-

lacquer fan, in the other a cluster of sacred bells, and with these she danced, a dance as strange and stately as any I have seen. With exaggerated slowness, her immobility unbroken, she made graceful gestures with the gold-lacquer fan, her motions accompanied by a shivering tremolo. I have never heard such chaste music—sad little pearls of sound that rained softly against my ears—nor seen a dance so empty of sex lure. And the priestess, so absorbed, so sedate, was a mystic of mystics. Once she turned, slowly, like a figure on a revolving platform; that was the only time she lifted her feet. Finally, with a last shower of those tears of music, she sank upon her knees, again bowing deeply, and resumed her motionless attitude; a stained-glass saint settling back into the prismatic window from which she had emerged briefly and miraculously.

I passed on, a picture of that mystical creature pressed into my memory. She and the young priest were of the same cult; yet how inconsistent they were! It was not, I realized, simply a difference between individuals; it was a dissimilarity of elements, two vastly foreign parts that through some inexplicable communion became one. . . . A strange religion, I reflected; a religion—for it is that—curiously divided between

ancient mysticism and modern materialism, demonology and efficiency; a compromise between the old gods of the spirit and a new and intensely personal god interested in bodily perfection.

EPISODE THE SEVENTH

MADAME BRANCH-OF-LOVE

1

"*AMATERASU Omikami yo! Kamano kawa nite fujō wo araisaru ni yori, ware wo Kyioku nashitami!* Wash me clean of all my impurity, O Sun-Goddess, as one washes away uncleanliness in the river of Kamo!"

I can hear her praying before the tall gold shrine in her house. Slender candles wound the gloom. Somewhere beyond the paper walls Madame Moth is picking her *samisen,* and Miss Flower is singing. Outside, a naked wind rides down the lane; the frail house shudders. . . . "*Amaterasu Omikami yo!* . . ." And then she rises and goes pattering to the hard bed where her husband lies. . . .

I picture her like that always, before the tall gold shrine in her house.

2

A bit of gossamer, this. I write with a rose-thorn dipped in dew; enchanted cobwebs snare

my pen, and a sheet of moonlight is my scroll. Listen; it is the tale of the Pancake Man and Madame Branch-of-Love. . . .

It began with a rickshaw ride; a promising start, for those spindly carriages are the true vehicles of adventure. Only sedan-chairs or palanquins are more fitted for escapade, and they because of a hint of dark Eastern eyes that follows them. To repeat, it began with a rickshaw ride—and in company with the Winsome Lady. To her ears had come whispers of brocades heavily crusted with gold and kimonos gorgeous as a royal courtezan's to be found in certain shops in Nihonbashi-ku, up Tokio way; and so, early one morning, we took the train from Yokohama to the Flowery Great Yedo, as Tokio was known in the days of vermilion-lacquered torii and gold court fans; a ride of some thirty or forty minutes. Followed, then, a morning that unreeled in a continuous film of bazaars and smiling merchants; of heaped silks and embroideries; of gleaming rows of bronze gods and lacquer-ware; all swimming in a mingling of odors alternately rich and offensive.

One must have been, at one time or another, in a land where ice-cream parlors and soda-fountains are scarce if they exist at all, to under-

stand the Winsome Lady's display of emotion as we rode along the Ghinza and she espied a sign announcing chocolate sundaes. She gave a shriek of delight and almost upset her rickshaw. A positive ecstasy came into her face as she pointed to the sign. Whereupon I confessed that I, too, had a passion for sundaes, particularly the kind made with nuts and cherries; and we went inside.

The place was vaguely reminiscent of a certain chain of white-enameled restaurants notorious throughout the United States for waffles; indeed, the first sight that met my eyes was a Nipponese gentleman enjoying that corrugated delicacy. The room was crowded with men, and our entrance caused something of a stir, as the advent of a foreigner always does in Japan. The Japanese, so polite as a rule, have an annoying habit of collecting about a European or American if he pauses in some public place, or, ruder still, making jocular comments in their own tongue.

The only vacant seats were at a table already occupied by a Japanese, and he courteously asked us to take them. He was eating pancakes, a fluffy golden mountain of them that looked so alluring I forsook the idea of a sundae. He

seemed pleased when he heard me give my order, for he looked up and smiled. I observed, then, that he was an extremely intelligent-looking fellow, and young.

The Winsome Lady remarked to me that it was the day of the Peach Fête, called Hina Matsuri, or the Feast of the Dolls, and that we should visit the Street of the Doll Shops.

Where was this street? I asked.

She did n't know.

But the Pancake Man did; and he announced the fact in excellent English accompanied by a shy, boyish smile.

Good! Then would he kindly direct us?

Indeed, no! He would accompany us.

But that would be too much trouble. . . .

Trouble? To assist a stranger in the city?

But his time . . .

Time! There was so much time, more time than anything else.

"I have been alone in San Francisco," he added with that shy smile; and I wondered, involuntarily, if any one had been as polite to him. . . .

And so we went to Jikken-dana, the Street of the Doll Shops. Rickshaws whirled us thither, shuttling through a many-colored swarm. Men were hurrying along, all solemn-visaged and car-

rying an air of definite purpose, the majority in foreign clothes but some few in the kimono-like coat and divided trousers of the Japanese men. Tiny creatures in kimonos, purple and blue the sovereign hues, minced past on clogs or pursued indifferent tram-cars with flying garments and uncertain steps. Boys raced by on bicycles, tooting their horns with maddening persistency.

Children scrambled and jostled each other on street and sidewalk; leaned out of windows; flowed from doorways, multiplying into such great numbers that I was forced to marvel at the somewhat vulgar prolificacy of the Japanese.

In the Jikken-dana there seemed to be more children than ever, queer little dolls, some not more than three or four, gazing out on the world through squinting eyes. They were more attractive at a distance; however, I dare say Japanese children will bear intimate inspection in warmer weather when such things as handkerchiefs are not necessary.

Descending from our exalted seats, we entered a shop where dusky shelves were peopled with slant-eyed pygmies of bisque and china. I have never seen so many dolls, and such gorgeous ones. I was attracted instantly by a sedate pair, rich in stiff brocades and seated on silk-padded

lacquer thrones. They, the Pancake Man explained, were called *odarai-sama,* and represented the mikado and the empress.

"It is a very wise custom, this Hina Matsuri," he said, "and very ingenuous. The dolls are figures of the emperor and the empress and their court, and little girls are taught the importance of each. These dolls are only brought out once a year, on this day, and their appearance is accompanied by feasting and entertainment. Therefore, Hina Matsuri associates the imperial family with confectionery and cakes, things pleasant to children; and it instils a more lasting worship of the throne than mere teaching would do."

The Winsome Lady expressed admiration for this subtle means of perpetuating emperor-worship, and added that the actual Feast of the Dolls in the household must be interesting. It was, indeed, the Pancake Man assured her; and would she like to see it? His home was too far to be visited without inconvenience, but a friend lived near, and he, this friend, would be delighted to open his doors to "distinguished foreigners." Followed polite demurs from us, gracious assurances from him. Then he went to a near-by telephone and returned shortly with the an-

nouncement that his friend would be honored to receive us.

So into the rickshaws again, through the many-colored swarm and to a quarter where bamboo and paper-walled houses were piled together like match-boxes. Before one of these miniature houses we stopped, entered a compound. The sliding doors outside the tiny veranda were pushed back by a rice-powdered, kimonoed maid who bowed profoundly; a quaint little bow performed by bending low from the hips and placing the hands on the knees. Behind her was a short, gray-templed man in a black kimono, our host; and with him his wife, even smaller than he, and with a black-lacquer coiffure that seemed too heavy for such a tiny body to carry. Followed more bows; words in Japanese. The Pancake Man explained that they wished to express their great pleasure at having such honorable guests. . . . We removed our shoes; another sliding door was pushed back; and we were initiated into the exquisite simplicity of a Japanese house.

The first apartment was the *okyakuma,* or guest-room. Matting covered the floor; the walls were bare. In one corner stood a cloisonné vase, from whose lips arched a spray of pink blossoms. A lacquered table, not more than six

inches high, occupied the center of the floor, and around this were the cushions upon which we sat. To sit properly in Japan one must sink upon his knees, then drop back upon his heels. This we did; and I endured it until my knees threatened to snap, then I shifted, very impolitely, to a cross-legged position.

For several minutes we sat shivering over the feeble brazier while our host made perfunctory conversation, and then, to our intense relief, we were led into an adjoining room where the Court of the Dolls was displayed in all its pygmy pomp.

In the *tokonoma,* an alcove slightly raised and adorned with a scroll and flowers, was a small six-fold gold screen with cherry-blossoms painted on it. In front of this sat the solemn imperial pair, *odarai-sama.* Arranged about them were five court musicians and three court ladies, all splendid in silks and brocades; little cups of sweet rice-liquor; fancy cakes and candies made to look like flowers and birds; and bowls of boiled rice and red beans. It was very charming, and as the Pancake Man had said, very ingenuous.

We returned to the *okyakuma* and there, shivering over the ineffectual coals, drank bitter tea from little cups of Satsuma and ate tasteless rice-cakes; after which we were conducted past the

sliding doors and to the veranda where, amid bows and smiles, we took our leave.

Where did we wish to go now? queried the Pancake Man. To our hotel?

No, we were staying in Yokohama; and, I added after a look at my watch, we had but a few minutes to catch our train.

There were many trains, he announced. . . .

Yes, but we must keep an engagement.

Ah! Then rickshaws would be too slow; we must take a tram-car. He would accompany us; no, it was useless for us to protest; it was his pleasure to see us to the station.

Came, then, a ride in a motor-bus whose conductor was a woman, a rush for tickets at the railway-station, and, through the window of the coach, a few parting words with the Pancake Man, an exchange of visiting-cards, and a promise that he would dine with us the following night in Yokohama.

3

Accordingly, the next evening I met the Pancake Man in the lounge of the Grand Hotel; and, after a few polite words, he drew from his pocket a flat package wrapped in tissue-paper which he said was a book, a small token of his

friendship. As I accepted it and saw what was written across the paper I gave a start; I am sure I did. There was but one thing to do, I decided immediately: explain that the Winsome Lady was simply a friend and not my wife; that it was considered proper in America for young men and young women to go about unchaperoned. But no. I knew that he, like most Japanese, was extremely sensitive, particularly in any situation involving a foreigner, and to call his attention to his error would embarrass him; so I must wait and let the Winsome Lady, who is more adroit in delicate matters, unknot the skein. . . .

Presently she came, and I gave her the package, explaining that it was a gift from the Pancake Man. She glanced at the inscription—and simply smiled! . . . Diaphanous escapade! The sort that one would expect in such a pygmy empire! And we played it to its whimsical end. . . .

Instead of dining at the hotel, we went to a Japanese restaurant, a *gunabe*-house. Rickshaws whirled us through lamp-riddled darkness, against a raw wind, and into a quarter where narrow lanes and alleys slunk past the pallid rectangles of rice-paper shutters, and the stars

gleamed like bayonet-points above a pattern of curling eaves and slanting roofs. We passed numerous open bazaars, their wares revealed by the flare of smoky lanterns. On verandas in front of these shops, and beyond, in cold rooms seen between paper screens, sat dark-kimonoed figures, some occupied with mysterious duties and others motionless, dreaming the unfathomable dreams of yellow men.

The restaurant, like many in Japan, was on the second story, and below it was a meat-market where the carcasses of goats and cows, purple with cold, hung on the street. At the head of the stairs waited several maids who bowed and giggled. A sliding wall was pushed back, and we were ushered into a bare room. In the center was the usual low table, the black cushions.

The *nakai,* or serving-maid, a snub-nosed little doll in blue kimono and flowered *obi,* brought the inevitable tea and rice, an amazing variety of raw vegetables, several kinds of uncooked meats, and condiments and sauces. I had resigned myself to a primitive dinner when two queer-looking braziers were produced. It was the custom for guests to cook their own meats, the Pancake Man explained. And he set about to do it. Chicken

and beef were cooked swimming in *soya* and placed in a bowl with rice. The Winsome Lady and I tried to use chop-sticks; and the Pancake Man smiled discreetly, and the *nakai* gurgled with laughter soft as summer rain. To add to our difficulties, we were informed that it was not good form to cut the meat before conveying it to the mouth, but, holding it in mid-air, to take a bite and return the remainder to the bowl. As dessert we had sweetmeats and thimble-cups of hot *sake*. The latter, unusually strong, kindled an exhilarating fire in my blood. I am sure it was responsible for my suggestion, a few minutes later, that we have geisha brought in to entertain us. At this the Pancake Man appeared displeased, then broke into a tolerant smile.

"You could scarcely be expected to know," he said, "that geisha are not discussed in the presence of ladies in Japan, not even in the presence of one's wife. They are, in conversation, bad form."

To relieve the slight tension I asked if he spoke French.

"No," he replied, seriously. "We Japanese rarely learn French. We prefer to master English. It is taught in our schools. You see, I am a teacher of English, and I give my boys

novels to read as part of their study, American novels. We prefer things American to things English. One no longer seeks a continental finish, but an American finish." He smiled. "We admire your method of education; it is broader than that of English schools. That is why I went to California—to study, to learn after the manner of Americans. Many Japanese boys wish to do the same, but it is more difficult now. Our Government has made it compulsory for a student to have a certain amount of money, a very large amount, before he can attend a foreign college. . . .

"Yes, we admire America," the Pancake Man went on. "I, personally, have great faith in its art and culture. Of course—if you will pardon me for speaking of it—there is one phase that is neglected, and that is politeness. But I suppose that when a nation is busy working out economical and commercial systems for the improvement of civilization it has n't time for small personal services. Out of your great confusion, your tall buildings, your iron-foundries, your mines, your mills and factories, will come a new kind of art, a rugged art, almost terrifying in its hugeness, and as radical as old Japanese art must seem to you. It will temporarily lose the beauty

of the human form; it will treat of bigger things. . . . Yes, I believe that. . . . And your books, too, will change. They are changing now. I prefer American novels to English novels." Then he smiled and added, "I particularly like your—what is his name? Fitzgerald? . . . Yes, Scott Fitzgerald!"

He drew a swift, audible breath through his teeth, as Japanese do when they are pleased.

"Yes, I am pleased by his books," he continued. "They show American life. I enjoy the cinema, too. There is one here in Yokohama now called 'Foolish Wives' which I saw in Tokio and liked. However, I regretted that my wife was with me, as it might cause unconventional ideas to grow in her head."

I did n't know he was married, I said. Why had n't he told us? His wife would have added to the pleasure of the dinner.

"It is doubtful if she could have come," he consoled us, "for I do not allow her to go out much. An abundance of pleasure makes a woman frivolous."

Then he dismissed the subject and inquired if we had seen "Foolish Wives"; and I replied that we had not and quickly suggested that we go to a Japanese theater.

"You will see only the end of the play," he said. "The performance begins in the morning and lasts until half-past nine at night."

Nevertheless, we went. He took us to a playhouse in Isezachi-cho, one of a number of theaters on the same street; a street brilliant with colored lamps and banners of white and scarlet. The annoying ceremony of removing the shoes occurred, and, wearing felt slippers, we mounted a flight of stairs to the upper gallery which, in Japanese theaters, is more exclusive than the lower floor. The seats were long benches; and over descending tiers of heads, the men wearing hats and the women with high varnished chignons, we could see the stage, an enormous affair that projected on one side. This projection, called *hananuchi,* or the Flowery Way, is where the actors enter and exit. I was more interested in the audience than the performers—particularly in three little maids standing close by arranging their coiffures to the hilarious amusement of themselves. One observed that she was receiving a certain amount of my attention, and she tittered behind her handkerchief and made some remark to her companions that caused them to throw me laughing glances. The frown of the Winsome Lady recalled me to the play, and

out of the corner of my eye I saw the three little maids, ridiculous in stiff sashes and flowing kimonos, go scampering down the aisle.

I found the performance rather stupid. The actors, all men, made grandiose gestures and recited their lines in voices that tapered to falsetto tones. Those who impersonated women seemed particularly ineffectual, for the illusion they sought to create was dissipated continually by the sudden appearance of a muscular leg between folds of silken cloth. Part of the play was in conversation and the rest choral, sung to the accompaniment of a *samisen* by a person or persons in the *tsubo,* a screened seat on the right of the stage. The stage was on rollers and revolved at the end of each scene. During this shifting of sets the actors moved back and forth on the rear of the stage, quite visible to the audience. The clever lighting and scenic illusions employed in America and Europe are absent in Japanese theaters, although later, at the Imperial Theater in Tokio, I saw a presentation of a snow-scene at night in the Yoshiwara that was as charming as an old print. But the Japanese dramas give one effect that requires more subtle artistry than scenery and lights: they create an atmosphere of exquisite unreality, suggestive of fairies and

gnomes and dragons, that Occidental stages rarely achieve. Their tragedies are bloody as medieval wars and are saved from being preposterous melodrama only by the sincerity of the actors and the seriousness of the audience.

We left before the performance was over and were rickshawed back to the hotel. The Pancake Man, in parting, asked if we would come to his home in Tokio the next night and meet his family. His mother played the *samisen,* and she had a friend staying in the house who was a teacher of *koto* music. They would entertain us. And we could meet his wife, Madame Branch-of-Love. . . . Branch-of-Love! A name cool as dew and moonlight, sweet as water-hyacinths. . . . Yes, we would come. But, the Winsome Lady put in, he must bring his wife, this Madame Branch-of-Love, to dine with us first. He should not be too severe with her this once. . . . He would permit her to come? Good! . . . And the Pancake Man left us, bowing, to return to his Madame Branch-of-Love.

4

I knew before I met Madame Branch-of-Love that I should fall in love with her, for her name

was sweet as a madrigal. . . . And when I saw her my heart was bound around with a golden chain. Her cheeks were white as a new moon; and her hair, ornamented with pins and combs, was piled high in the fashion called *marumage* which is exclusively for married ladies. It was, indeed, a very magnificent coiffure, and tiny, sloe-soft eyes told me that she was aware of it. Her kimono was purple, a rich imperial hue; her *obi,* gold-cloth and meshed at her back like captive fire. White *tabi,* socks with divided toes, peeped out from the brocaded straps of *geta,* or low clogs. And she had a smile that would melt even ice-cowled Fuji-san; a smile that appeared with unsuspected loveliness as the Pancake Man proudly presented her.

"I regret that she does not speak English," he apologized. "I am teaching her, and she understands very well but cannot talk. You see, we have been married only a few months."

Whereupon Madame Branch-of-Love, actress that she was, lowered her eyes. . . .

When we went into dinner I offered my arm, and, with a quick glance at her husband, she took it hesitantly, her touch as light as a flower. In the doorway of the dining-room she gave a little gasp, almost a squeal; delight widened her eyes.

The Pancake Man spoke quickly in Japanese, and she sobered.

"You must pardon her," he explained. "She has never seen so many ladies in low-neck gowns except in 'Foolish Wives.' "

. . . A dinner quaint and unreal as a Miyagawa Choshun print. Madame Branch-of-Love watched every move of her Pancake Man, who for her benefit was delightfully grave, and emulated each gesture, her little face made more charming by an expression of exaggerated seriousness. Once, when she started to sip wine, he rebuked her with assumed sternness.

"Spiritous liquor is not good for a wife," he informed us; and Madame Branch-of-Love smothered a giggle and looked down at her plate.

After dinner we took the train for Tokio. The Pancake Man, looking as dignified as youth can, asserted that American girls were setting a deplorable example for their Japanese sisters, some of whom were bobbing their hair, smoking cigarettes, and even drinking alcoholic beverages.

"American men do not assert themselves with their women," he observed, genially critical. "They should be more austere, like Japanese men." And to illustrate, he spoke with assumed

severity to Madame Branch-of-Love, who tittered and pulled down her sleeves. "I told her," he explained, "to adjust her kimono, that too much of her arm was revealed." He smiled. "By correcting a wife several times during the evening the superiority of the husband is preserved. That is not suppressing our women, as it is believed, but assuming the masculine prerogative, which is the rightful heritage of men."

He leaned over to me, still smiling. "You think that that is absorbing the individuality of the female, don't you? I will tell you a secret. Japanese women are very clever. They pretend to be subjected, and, through their acting, rule the empire. Most men do not know this and, therefore, miss the truth of the old saying, *onna-naradewa-yo no akenu kuni,* which means that Japan is the land where the sun never shines except for its women."

We took a taxicab from the railway station to the Pancake Man's house in Nihonbashi. It was in a little lane of rice-paper and bamboo walls, and the sliding door was opened by a maid who prostrated herself in the ancient fashion. In the vestibule-way was the family: a woman gray-haired and gray-kimonoed, who looked like a soft, gentle moth, his mother; another in dull

blue, his aunt; a third, also in blue, whose connection I never learned; and an elderly man resplendent in silk *haori* and *hakama,* his father. In addition to the relatives, there was a little creature in a flowered kimono and towering headdress, the *koto*-teacher.

With many bows we were presented, and while we removed our shoes, the father delivered a welcome-speech which the Pancake Man translated. This finished, we were conducted into the *okyakuma,* whose simplicity was spoiled by chairs placed there for us. In one corner, creating a delicate flare of color, stood a gold screen edged with black lacquer, upon which a peacock had been painted in brown and green and azure.

When we had expressed admiration for the room, thus displaying our familiarity with Japanese etiquette, the father and the aunt excused themselves, and Madame Moth, the mother, and Miss Flower, the teacher, tuned their instruments. The Pancake Man, seated on the floor beside a *hibachi,* or brazier, explained that they were about to play a little legend, the words of which Miss Flower would sing. This legend was of ancient Yedo and an *oiran,* or royal courtezan, who loved a *daimio.* . . .

Miss Flower started on the *koto,* a zither-like

instrument, played flat on the floor. Upon its wooden frame is a curved sounding-board of paulownia wood and thirteen strings of silk mounted on ivory bridges. These strings are plucked by the thumb and two adjoining fingers of the right hand, to each of which is attached an ivory plectrum. Madame Moth joined in with the *samisen*, a three-stringed banjo, picked with an ivory spatula. A most bewildering undulation of sound rose from the instruments, ranging from deep-throated twangs to a thin squeaking. And then Miss Flower sang. Her voice ran an uncertain scale, now nasal, now from the chest, now rising to a falsetto pitch.

I sat there, amazed and shocked. Could it be, I asked myself, that these little yellow people, so filled with a love of beauty, believed this to be music; this rain of notes, without harmony or tune? Or were we wrong, we arrogant Westerners? Perhaps the torrents of sound, the low murmuring and gently passionate or chaste strains that we called symphonies were, in reality, crude and faulty, too sophisticated, too technical to be music as it was originally conceived. . . . God! How vastly different are the races of earth! I thought. How can there be anything but armistices between bloody disorders so long

as there are such appalling discrepancies among men? The world suddenly seemed out of focus; my faith in the accepted order of things—codes and traditions transmuted to me with the authentic stamp of generations—dissolved into somber darkness.

Gradually it came to me that all this uncertainty was born out of the music; a somewhat astounding revelation. For, if that were true, could it be that the sounds were discord? The result of discord would be antagonism. . . . No, there must be some tone besides the dissonant twanging, an undernote soft and beguiling, perceptible to an antenna of the senses rather than to the ear. . . . Yes, it was there, a flow of sounds that told of a pygmy empire sprung up on a toy archipelago. A spirit so tiny, so joyous, and yet so melancholy. It was the soul, I realized, that Puccini had snared in diaphanous shrouds. In "The Duet of the Flowers," with its note of false security, was the fairy-like unsubstantiality of Japanese gardens, the delightful uncertainty of their paper houses; and in "Un bel di vedremo" and "O quant' Occhi fisi" the mournful twilight that ferments in households where dreams incomprehensible brew. . . . There is a feeling of tragedy in Japan despite

its blossoms and its *papier-mâché* people, a mood best expressed in its music; a little wistful note, half a sob, half a sigh, that Puccini heard and imprisoned in Western harmony. . . .

Madame Moth and Miss Flower finished the legend with little flourishes quaintly Japanesque. Proper etiquette demanded that we shower them with praise and entreat them to play more. We did; and Miss Flower giggled and Madame Moth smiled gently as befitting a lady of her age. And so they twanged another legend, and little butterflies of notes fluttered about the room to the incongruous accompaniment of a melancholy undertone.

After this informal concert we were initiated into the mysteries of *chanoyu,* or the tea ceremony, a popular practice, almost a religious rite, among all classes of Japanese. We were led into a room that in some inexplicable way seemed different from the others; certainly it was colder. In the *tokonoma* were floral decorations, a scroll and an incense-burner. Madame Branch-of-Love, who took charge of affairs with a delightfully important manner, seated herself on a mat in front of a hearth sunk in the floor. The Winsome Lady and I sat on mats opposite her, with the Pancake Man on our right; Madame

Moth and Miss Flower knelt in the background and did not participate.

"The *chanoyu,*" explained our host, "is a cult for promoting mental composure, also for the temporary dissolution of social differences, for during the ceremony Samurai and laborer are equal. It requires some time to master it; one must know, among other things, the *ikebana,* or flower arrangement, and incense-burning. The etiquette of *chanoyu* is difficult. I will show you how it is done, although the guests should drink first."

Madame Branch-of-Love was quite busy over an iron kettle on the hearth. Arranged neatly on a mat at her side was the paraphernalia to be used in the ceremony; tea-bowls, a tea-caddy, whisk, bamboo spoon, and numerous other utensils I could not name. While she sifted powdered tea-leaves into a cup the Pancake Man placed pieces of rice-paper in front of us and on each a cube of *gyuhi,* a sort of Turkish Delight.

"Everything for the *chanoyu* is special," he said, "even the fuel for the fire, which is charred azalea branches coated with lime. The tea used is called *koi-cha,* or thick tea."

When the water was boiling, Madame Branch-of-Love poured a little over some powdered tea

and beat the green liquid until it frothed, then, with that simple grace that was hers, placed the mixture in front of her husband. He, in the meantime, had eaten the *gyuhi;* and now he picked up the bowl in both hands, turned it three times, and took a swallow. Then he bowed with exaggerated gravity; Madame Branch-of-Love smiled; and he consumed the remainder, which, according to custom, must be taken in two and a half swallows. This done, he passed the bowl to his wife, who washed it, and also the implements she had used to prepare the tea, and wiped each with a silk cloth.

The Winsome Lady and I followed the example of the Pancake Man, awkwardly I fear, while Madame Branch-of-Love smiled at our efforts, and Madame Moth and Miss Flower looked on interestedly.

"You see now," said the Pancake Man when the ceremony was over, "the effect of *chanoyu;* your composure is greatly improved, is it not?"

Decidedly, we affirmed; and, with smiles, we rose. It was late, I ventured, and . . . Oh, no, we must not think of leaving so early! the Pancake Man entreated. We must see his study, the cave into which the dragon of the household

retreated to read and meditate when the little kingfisher-wife twittered too much.

We went up-stairs, and then came one of those anticlimaxes that are so characteristic of modern Japan. His study was fitted out in conventional Occidental fashion with leather chairs, polished tables, and electric lamps! On one table was a row of books. As I glanced at the volumes I caught, among other titles, "The American Language" by H. L. Mencken. . . . In a corner stood a Victrola. Madame Branch-of-Love gestured toward it and spoke to her husband.

"She says that she would like to see you and your wife do the American dances," he translated, beaming.

We demurred, but finally consented; and, when the father and the aunt had arrived, summoned to witness the performance, the Pancake Man put on a record which he said was just the piece for an American dance. The next moment we heard the notes of "Dixie"! . . . And so we danced, in our stocking feet, while the Pancake Man, Madame Moth, the father, and the aunt looked on with smiles, and Madame Branch-of-Love and Miss Flower, less dignified, tittered

behind their hands, which is the accepted manner of laughing in polite Japanese society.

Applause rewarded our demonstration. As further proof of good favor, the Pancake Man brought out photographs of his wedding ceremony, and also pictures of famous Japanese actors, and tea was served, this time clear and golden and accompanied by cakes and confections.

Suddenly I discovered that it was well beyond midnight, and I informed my host that we would have to leave if we expected to catch the train to Yokohama. There followed a few words between him and his father; then he announced it was too late to return to Yokohama; that trains and electric cars had stopped running; and that his father begged the honor of our presence under his roof until morning. There was a room . . .

The Winsome Lady looked suddenly very conscious. I tried to think of something to say, but my brain was lame. I knew that to refuse without explanation would offend them—and yet if I did explain they, being Japanese, would see no humor in the situation nor would they understand. I groped. . . . In America, I said with assumed gravity, it was not custom-

ary for a wife to remain out overnight. He could understand surely; we, as the Japanese, had little customs that were very quaint. . . .

He appeared perplexed but smiled and said that he understood. However, he didn't see how we were going to get to Yokohama. We would have to go to a hotel. He would take us . . .

Indeed, no! the Winsome Lady broke in; we would return in a taxicab.

A taxicab! Of course! Why had not he thought of that? He would call one immediately.

And so we left them there, in their little doll-house with its incongruous Western room. The family—the father, the aunt, Madame Moth, and Miss Flower—went as far as the vestibule with us, bowing and smiling, but the Pancake Man and Madame Branch-of-Love accompanied us to the motor-car. A cold wind swept down the gray street, and Madame Branch-of-Love, shivering, leaned against her husband, like a slender birch-tree bent and resting upon a tall, straight pine.

"Farewell, Madame Branch-of-Love," I said, extending my hand and feeling a touch soft as a lotus-petal.

"Sayonara!" she lilted.

The Pancake Man and I shook hands; he bowed to the Winsome Lady; then the cab door crashed shut, and through its frosted pane I caught a last glimpse of Madame Branch-of-Love, kimono flying, tiny white feet twinkling, as she pattered into the house beside the husband who enacted the rôle of master with delightful farce.

5

"Amaterasu Omikami yo! . . ."

I can hear them praying before the tall gold shrines in their houses. . . . Candles in the gloom . . . the wail of a *samisen* . . . the shudder of wind-harried walls . . . and a hard bed where the husband lies. . . .

I picture them like that always, before the tall gold shrines in their houses.

EPISODE THE EIGHTH

THE HEAVENLY CITY

1

KIOTO . . . a cool, crystal pool in which to plunge the tired imagination. In moments of weariness I go back to it, like a tired traveler seeking rest. For always—whether I see it folded in gray beneath a sky cloud—burdened, or feathered with flurries of snow, or drowsing in the sunset, valleys purple and hills like faded coral—it seems incredibly clear and brilliant as a sea-garden clarified by tropical water. Its greatest gift is a sense of repose, for centuries have taught it the secret of composure, and imperial masters have left an atmosphere of distinction and dignity, all expressed in cool, templed groves and valleys that deploy into sun-drenched hills. But with all its serenity, its exalted antecedents, Kioto is friendly, a true celestial whose divinity is made secure by communion with men.

My first panoramic view of it was from the

dining-room of a hotel that hangs on a hillside overlooking the town. It was dusk, and, below, myriad lights trembled in skeins of mist, like luminous flies trapped in a cobweb. About them circled a dim ridge of hills—a vast, round loom on which the gauzy net was spun. The city lay before me like a challenge. And then, to heighten the fanciful effect, there was Aiko-san—Aiko-san whose dreams are bound by hard-crusted rolls and bottles of *tansan*—that smiling, laughing little *musumé* of twelve or thirteen who was my waitress.

Aiko-san, do you remember that I promised to put you into a book? As if that were possible! I could never capture in cold words those tiny dimples that broke the smooth sweep of your cheeks nor the laughter that bubbled from your doll's lips nor your ridiculous little steps as you ran to fetch some such stupid necessity as fried potatoes or boiled fish. You were childishly amused by your Man-Who-Ate-So-Much; and did it never enter your *musumé* brain that he might have consumed more than he wished or could digest properly, simply to hear your laughter, to see your tiny feet go flying kitchenward? Little *musumé* of laughter, the patter

of your feet goes lilting across my memory now. And I find a tragic *leit-motif* in their pygmy echoes. How brief will be your blossoming! For a while you will serve the passing foreigners, and some you will serve more than others; and then you will be given in marriage. . . . To some young poet who will weave fragrant dreams to make you smile? I fear that, instead, your lord will be some fatuous merchant whose dominance will smother your laughter. And yet, will you be unhappy? I wonder. . . . You, like your country, leave me with a sense of melancholy confusion . . . a doll moving incongruously through a drama, apparently unaware of its mournful theme. . . .

After dinner, that first night, I answered the challenge of the firefly lights. Aiko-san had left me in a laughing mood, a mood that demanded irresponsible adventure; and so I set out to find it. As my rickshaw-man jogged down the winding roadway he started a conversation in English, speaking with a fluency that was unusual for one of his calling; indeed, it is rare to find a coolie who knows more than a few words of English.

"I Number One rickshaw-man, and you Num-

ber One gentleman," he said with genial familiarity. "I take you see Number One sights. Where we go first?"

And I replied recklessly, "Anywhere!"

2

Down into the city we go, to its very heart where it beats with gay sounds and colors—Theater Street. It lies off the main thoroughfare, Gion-matchi, and, because of an ordinance excluding vehicles, I follow my coolie on foot. The majority of Oriental streets are shabby in reality. But not so with Theater Street, Kioto. It is the fulfilment of the most extravagant dreams of Oriental gorgeousness. It blazes with light, with rockets of false stars, with artificial moons of scarlet and gold, all mingling in a luminous confusion as weird as some astral carnival. Banners of crimson, of green and black, all startling with dragon-like ideographs, hang in front of the theaters, and the façades of restaurants and shops are brilliant with gilt. The people are no less exotic than their surroundings. Little dolls, alabaster-cheeked and carmine-lipped, clatter along behind indifferent,

black-cloaked men, their kimonos a motley of soft night-moth shades.

My rickshaw coolie, having appointed himself guide, is leading; and suddenly he dives under a fiber fringe hanging on the left of the narrow street. I follow, stepping from a blazing world into a dim, damp alleyway that, as my eyes become accustomed to the change, resolves into a queer tunnel ribbed with bamboo.

"This Number One restaurant," explains the rickshaw-man, who has told me his name is Jen.

"But I don't want food," I protested.

He laughs. "Oh, you no eat now; just look. Some time you come back, have nice dinner, and geisha sing and dance."

I recall, as he speaks, that I have heard much of the Kioto geisha, the Gion school; and I ask Jen where they may be seen.

"We go to Number One geisha-house to-night; yes, I know place," he announces with that indrawn hiss peculiar to Japanese.

The tunnel ends in a cool, moist garden where stone lanterns diffuse meager light on dwarf cedars and camellias, and a tiny brook gurgles beneath a Lilliputian bridge. Inclosing this miniature courtyard are fragile verandas and

rice-paper shutters. A half-open door reveals several Japanese men sitting on the floor around a low lacquered table. A maid comes out and bows; another; a third. Jen returns their salutations and addresses them, obviously explaining our presence. The maids make low obeisances, my coolie responds, and we retrace our way through the tunnel.

For nearly an hour I drink in the rich atmosphere of Theater Street, exploring amusement-halls and bazaars and buying much that I do not want simply because the shopkeepers are so delightfully polite. Jen is annoyed, for these are not Number One shops and should not be patronized by Number One gentlemen. My crowning purchase is an *obi,* a flowered satin sash, in color the iridescent purple of a pigeon's throat. Aiko-san will be pleased with it, I am sure. . . .

From Theater Street we rattle back along Gion-matchi, over the Shijo-bashi, and into a narrow street where geisha, brocaded and powdered and carrying their instruments in black-lacquered boxes, go tottering along on high clogs. This roadway leads to a walled inclosure containing several buildings which Jen says is the geisha school.

"In spring great cherry-blossom festival here," he explains. "Pretty, very pretty; yes! Number One sight! But now it closed; nothing to see."

We go back to Gion-matchi by the same street, and as we roll along to the accompanying *pad-pad* of Jen's soft-shod feet, he indicates the rows of houses on either side, saying:

"Some geisha-house, some brothel. Geisha's doorway marked with green numbers, prostitutes with red. Very bad street."

He displays a sense of delicacy unusual for a rickshaw man. . . .

The geisha, by way of didactic exposition, are a sect of entertainers that have flourished since 1751. Officially, they are not prostitutes. Indeed, some geisha are most refined and charming, and accomplished in poetry as well as conversation and music. However, as in all instances where a large number of women are gathered together for the purpose of amusement, there are many individuals who traffic in merchandise other than smiles and songs. "Geisha are as bad as *Joro*," was the opinion of Count Okuma. In fact, I found very few Japanese men who held any illusions about the morality of the geisha. As one gentleman pointed out to

me, *Joro,* or prostitutes, are confined while geisha are permitted to go among the best people. The *machiai*—literally, waiting-houses—once used as places where lovers could meet or friends gather to discuss current topics, now are turned into brothels by prostituting geisha, he said. The taxes payable by geisha are by no means small; furthermore, many of the officials who could restrict these women are under their influence. Japanese wives rarely attend dinners where geisha entertain, and the result often is that the legal mate is neglected for the soft-winged night-moth. In conclusion my Japanese friend expressed the opinion that frequently geisha were dangerous because of the information they secure from distinguished political guests. "A man," he said sagely, "will reveal his secrets to his mistress, an acknowledged equal in immorality, but never to a prostitute, whom he considers his inferior."

The *geisha-matchi,* or amusement quarter, into which Jen takes me, lies north of Gion Street, between the river and a canal. Narrow little alleys plunge between lines of houses with lattice-work fronts, and from behind rice-paper walls comes the melancholy twanging of *samisen* music. Tiny butterfly-creatures trip along on wooden

clogs, their faces coins of pallor in the gloom. We halt before a low door, and I follow Jen inside, into a sort of vestibule. A maid appears, and my coolie makes the arrangements; then, shoes removed, I am led up-stairs and into a room exquisitely plain and cold. There I sit and wait.

Presently a sliding panel is pushed back, and a gray *nesan,* or old geisha, enters, bowing profoundly. She talks in Japanese for fully a minute, and I do not interrupt. Undoubtedly she is telling me that the Number One lady is making her toilet or is engaged at present. Or, more likely, she informs me that instead of paying fifteen *yen,* as arranged down-stairs, I must add five more for the privilege of being amused by a person so splendid as the Number One dancer. When she has finished I bow and smile tranquilly, and she prostrates herself and departs, leaving me alone in the frigid room.

I smoke as I wait. In the next house a *samisen* is whining; I hear men's laughter and now and then the trilling crescendo of a feminine voice. It is very annoying to be kept waiting in an ice-box. . . .

At last! The *shoji* flutters open; a girl bows. But can this be the Number One dancer, this

homely creature in striped kimono and dark sash?

"Konban-wa," she squeaks.

I understand that she is telling me "good evening," and I return the greeting.

Following her is a maid with the expected *sake*. Cups and a thin-necked pitcher of delicate Satsuma ware are placed on the lacquered table, and the geisha sinks down beside me. Filling one of the tiny cups, she hands it to me. I drink the liquor, then wash the cup in a bowl of water there for that purpose, refill it, and offer it to the geisha. She gulps the rice-wine quite audibly. This, I have been told, is good form. Follows a long silence, during which I sit there, shifting uneasily, and she becomes a wooden image. Suddenly I comprehend that this is the geisha always sent to entertain the guest while waiting for the musicians and dancers. I laugh. She, being a well-bred person, smiles. And we continue to sit.

After what seems years of arctic silence there comes a patter outside the sliding panel, and through the doorway, bowing and smiling, enters the Number One lady—a little girl not over twelve! Behind her is a singing geisha carrying the usual black-lacquer box filled with the necessary instruments. But she does not interest

me; I am charmed with the tiny dancer. A spray of flowers is woven into her exaggerated chignon, and her looped sash is of the very finest brocade. Her long kimono, a marvel of gray silk embroidered with gold and silver cranes and cerise blossoms, clings gracefully to her ankles, parting to reveal an undergarment of cinnabar red and spreading in a padded train about her dainty feet. She is so very stately and so small!

She bows with the grace of a court lady and kneels opposite me, the singing geisha beside her. I realize that she desires to be served *sake,* and I feel reluctant to offer that raw rice-liquor to such a child. But I must be polite. She accepts the Satsuma cup with hands of porcelain fineness and lifts it to lips bright with vermilion paint. I stare, astonished, as she drinks the wine in one swallow. I then serve the singing geisha, and the initial formalities are over.

From one of her long sleeves the Number One lady, Miss Little Crane, draws a gold-lacquer fan; the other geisha removes the parts of a *samisen* from the black box and assembles them. *Twang, twang!* she tunes the banjo. Miss Little Crane adjusts her *obi;* rises; takes her place in the far end of the room, in an alcove-like

space. *Twang, twang!* again. Miss Little Crane looks faintly annoyed. Finally, the *samisen* is properly tuned. . . .

It is a story that Miss Little Crane tells, of an ancient lady of Kioto who sought to charm a lord of the Samurai. In reality, that may not be the tale at all, but it is the story that her quaint little gestures convey to me. One moment she is gentle as April rain, coquetting with her gold-lacquer fan; the next she is stately and scornful, her dragging robes accentuating the pygmy majesty of her sweeping walk. At intervals the singing geisha raises her falsetto voice in sharp song, explaining the motions of Miss Little Crane. But, even though I could understand, it would be unnecessary: the child's every motion, her every glance, speaks with superb artistry. I sit there, enchanted, beside the wooden image in the striped kimono.

The dance ends with a flutter of the golden fan, a glance of triumph from tiny eyes; and Miss Little Crane bows very low. I doubt that clapping is good form, so I express my appreciation with smiles and an enthusiastic "Arigato!" This pleases the Number One lady, and she dances again. While she is going through her grace-

ful pantomime the gray *nesan* enters and kneels behind me. . . .

The dance finished, Miss Little Crane seats herself opposite to me with a delightfully affected sigh of weariness. I wonder if the entertainment is over or if this is an intermission. The *nesan* answers that question indirectly. She speaks in Japanese, and I listen attentively. When she has finished I smile politely. A moment passes; the *nesan* looks at me, puzzled. Again she speaks; again I smile. Miss Little Crane blows her tiny nose on a sheet of tissue-paper which she drops, crushed into a ball, into one of her sleeves. I sense a tension. In English I say, "I do not understand." The *nesan,* evidently comprehending, dips one finger into the *sake* and traces the figure "17" on the table. Ah! Now I know! My bill. But why is it seventeen *yen* when it was to be only fifteen? I likewise moisten my finger and write "17" and then deduct "2" from it. The *nesan* shakes her head and points to each of the girls in turn, then to herself. . . . Of course! They are to receive a present of fifty *sen* apiece. . . .

This mercenary transaction concluded, I rise. Miss Little Crane takes my hand and leads me to

the stair and below. Jen is waiting. My shoes are slipped on, laced.

"Sayonara! Arigato!" says Miss Little Crane with charming demureness.

"Sayonara! Arigato!" echoes the *nesan.*

"Sayonara!" I reply.

And I go rattling to the hotel through dim quarters where night-watchmen beat wooden clappers together with annoying persistency.

3

The sheer loveliness of those Kioto mornings! Each day I was awakened by the maid who came very early to make a fire, and from my bed I could look down upon the city, frosty roofs burning through a cold blue haze. In the distance, like steel melting in a smoky furnace, lay the hills, their summits and slopes seeming liquified by the moisture, their bases dissolved entirely. The sunlight, sifting through the mist, caught the rich greens of cedar and pine and photographed them in verdant splashes upon the hazed valleys. . . . And then, exhilarated by that sumptuous view, I would go down into the dining-room and there, over bacon and eggs, indulge in a delightful flirtation with Aiko-san.

That charming *musumé,* whose friendship had been made more secure by the gift of the purple sash, invariably laughed at some mistake she was sure to make, and its rippling sweetness stayed with me through the day.

For the first few days Jen insisted that I visit as many temples and palaces as possible. I objected. But it was the thing to do, he said, and everybody who was anybody did it. He was horrified at my lack of interest in the holy and imperial edifices of Kioto; nor did he understand my explanation that the idea of deliberately setting out to "do" the city, to try to absorb it architecturally, religiously, and historically, was quite offensive to me. Finally, to satisfy his sense of propriety I had to surrender.

Temples . . . I saw hundreds of temples. My imagination became stooped and weary from carrying the weight of ponderous places of worship, cavernous halls, and cloisters where faded gold-leaf and worn carvings displayed their worm-eaten splendors in musk-freighted gloom. I remember, confusedly, gray, curling roofs and gilt-fretted façades beyond which, in dim oratories, were altars over-ornamented with black and gold and surrounded by age-mottled lacquer drums and bronze lanterns scaly with verdigris.

Dead things; and the musk of the tomb hung heavy in them. I confess that I find nothing interesting nor illuminating in temples whose history I do not know (and am too indolent to learn), and that are not beautiful but simply ancient; they are as ineffectual as old men whose only claim to distinction is a multiplicity of years.

Palaces . . . yes, palaces, too. The Imperial Palace, Nijo Palace. . . . Great sand-colored walls and the tops of cypress and pine interlaced in gnarled greenery. Cold gardens and little pools filmed with ice. Cave-like white rooms filled with pure silences; chaste corridors and sliding screens painted with birds and flowers; bare ceremonial halls and audience-chambers; a monstrously large throne-room where the furniture was smothered in mustard-colored covers. . . . Melancholy splendors, so heavily swathed in silence, that they left me aching for the sound of many voices. The atmosphere was too oppressively imperial for my imagination to respond beyond vague pictures of chalk-faced queens and emperors who intrigued and died in those chilling halls, all with a distressing amount of ceremony.

Late one afternoon, when I thought all the

temples were exhausted, Jen took me up a hill north of Maruyama Park and deposited me below a monster gate that towered from the top of gray stone stairs. This, he informed me, was the largest torii in Japan, and beyond it was a Buddhist monastery occupied by priests of the Jodo sect. Was there, I demanded suspiciously, a temple there also? There was, he admitted, but it was very beautiful, the Number One temple in all Kioto. With a sigh, I mounted the steps and passed under the two-storied gate. Instantly my antagonism dissolved. Beyond naked cherry-trees and feathery evergreens were walls and lyrical roofs whose soft grayness had a quality of warmth unusual in a Japanese temple, and in the background rose a wooded hill, black against the darkening rose-tinged sky. It came to me possessively, that scene, with the force of some old, familiar place rediscovered, and I found rest in the sweeping perspective of dusk-subdued grays and greens.

Two stone lanterns flanked the approach to the temple, around which were the monastery buildings; and close by the pillars that supported the tremendous roof was a sacred basin in which to cleanse the hands before entering. I did not go inside, for I heard the purling murmur of

orisons, but from the gallery I caught the glow of dull gold and gleaming columns. As I wandered about the grounds, followed by Jen, a number of priests, gray-robed, moved slowly by, gazing at me abstractedly. Big moths cruised through the dusk. . . . There was a serenely detached atmosphere about the place. . . . The soft song of temple gongs, the endless drone of prayer, and the perpetual spinning of monastic intrigues.

I climbed the hill to a great bell that hung suspended from heavy scaffolding in a chapel of shrubbery and from which vantage the temple and adjacent buildings could be seen through the branches. While I was there an aged priest came out of the gloomy woods behind the bell, and Jen spoke to him familiarly, then introduced me. He proved to be a charming old ascetic whose limited English did not prevent him from being extremely hospitable. He insisted that I accompany him to the monastery, and there followed an interesting half-hour of wandering in dim halls and in rooms that smelled faintly of musk. Before I left I had a cup of tea with him, and he made me promise to return. When I departed, twilight had deepened to night, and although the soft grays and greens were dissi-

"SHE DANCES WITH QUAINT LITTLE GESTURES . . . GENTLE AS APRIL RAIN . . . "

A KIOTO TEMPLE

pated in darkness, the place had lost none of that indefinable charm that lifted it above the other temples I had seen in Kioto.

The day after that first visit to the Chion-in Monastery I explored the bazaars. . . . Those gorgeous shops! Embroideries, silks and sandalwood, peacock fans, ivory, damascene and cloisonné! Never shall I forget them; the low, dark rooms, with raw silks in dusky corners or piled in brilliant mountains of color against the somber walls; all swimming in the inevitable odor of musk. Particularly vivid are my recollections of a place in Furmonzen, a certain silk shop. Whenever I visited this establishment, and I went often for the sheer color of the experience, the proprietor and salesmen, in either black or gray kimonos greeted me with smiles and bows and conducted me up creaking stairs into a tiny, dim room, and there drew from shelves and chests fabrics that transported my imagination to regions chromatic. Gray silk kimonos, lined with flame-hue and embroidered in gold; bright blue kimonos, woven through with threads of moonlight and dusk; apricot-colored kimonos, heavy with gold-crusted peacocks and exotic blossoms. On my first visit I saw one that possessed me instantly, a robe of

such flawless white that, in the dusky room, it burned my eyes. Across the back was embroidered a white phenix whose beak was delicately shaded into silver and whose feathers were tipped with gold; not the gilt-like temple gold but a gold soft as melted sunlight. Its chaste magnificence was more regal than imperial purple; and immediately I determined to own it. After at least twenty minutes of haggling, the proprietor declared that he knew I desired the kimono passionately, and, as it was his wish to please me at any cost, he would sacrifice it for two thirds of the original price. The kimono was wrapped in flowered paper and presented to me with many smiles and lilied words. Then I was conducted below and bowed out. And it was all done so politely that I enjoyed being overcharged outrageously.

4

Some few days after my initial visit to the Chion-in Monastery, the old priest whom I had met there sent me a note written in Japanese; a very elaborate affair done in India-ink upon a scroll of rice-paper. Jen, who brought it, could not translate it, for he was able to read only Kana, but he knew the contents, and informed

me that there was to be a very special high mass in the Chion-in Temple early the next morning, and that Father Sagata, the old monk, would be honored to have me come. . . .

5

It is four o'clock and I am awakened by a "boy" knocking on my door. What a dismal hour to rise! From my bed I see the sky, dark and bruised; blue mists sleep on the city. A few lights are lost in that wilderness of roofs below, like strayed and lonely stars, and the hills seem dim as the dreams from which I have been aroused.

I go below and find Jen waiting. His cheerful smile is rather annoying. Why, I wonder as we squash down the muddy driveway, do men celebrate mass at such an hour? Surely there can be no religion in their souls! I sink deeper into the rickshaw and draw the rug closer about me to shut out the cold.

A few people are astir in the melancholy streets, and their presence in such small numbers seems to accentuate the desertion. Some greet me with a smiling "Ohayo!" The air, spirited as champagne, is beginning to exhilarate me in

spite of myself, and I return the salutations almost genially. In the east a diffused gold, like powdered amber, is stirred into the blue; the haze is lifting. We are parallel with a canal. Under the clear water long strips of cloth, made secure by some mysterious means, ripple and waver; left there by the natives who cleanse newly dyed fabrics in that manner.

At last we reach the hill that ascends to the Chion-in. I make the climb on foot, and the exercise distils wine into my blood. Under the great teakwood gate I pause to drink in the scene, the misty loveliness of evergreens and gray buildings. The trees on the hill seem to dissolve into a verdant waterfall that flows into the courtyard in majestic silence and there dissipates, as if by magic.

I move on, passing a number of Japanese bound for the temple. On the steps of the great building my friend, Father Sagata, is waiting. After we shake hands, I remove my shoes, and we mount with a thin stream of worshipers. We enter through one of the nine doors. Inside, in a dim corner, Father Sagata has arranged a chair for me.

The temple is sunk in mauve gloom. In the center is a huge bronze incense-burner that sends

up a heavy dragon of smoke to dissolve near the ceiling and leave the air drunk with an exotic sweetness. The shrines, given a liquid quality by the dusk, melt into a brocade of black and gold, a magic fabric stretched on the fabulous loom of gilded pillars. On the altar are bronze-colored candles; below it, lacquered drums. Outside the chancel-rail kneel the assembling devotees, gray shadows in the vastness of the temple. Many are praying aloud, some striking small red drums as they murmur their orisons, others clasping holy beads. Their voices, at times, resolve into distinguishable words.

"Namu-amie-daibutsu! Namu-amie-daibutsu!"

In how many different tongues, in how many cathedrals, mosques, and temples over the world have I heard that mournful plaint! A prayer of anguish from beings vainly digging at the Riddle of Life and Death! As I listen, a somber reflection steals over me. I, too, have striven to know that Secret, some few times sincerely seeking knowledge, but generally stirred by wretched fears; and, as I realize this, I no longer seem a stranger in the temple, but one of that gathering and a member of a vast faith whose creed is a pathetic confession of abysmal ignorance.

"Namu-amie-daibutsu . . ."

A gong sounds somewhere in the temple, and the great high-ceilinged hall makes the ring seem swollen. It engulfs me in a giant vibration that sinks slowly, quivering, into aching silence. Father Sagata, with a whispered excuse, drifts away in the dusk, losing himself in a near-by doorway. I wait, expectant, but nothing happens. The devout are still praying.

"Namu-amie-daibutsu . . ."

How mournful it sounds in the early morning, and rising through incense-soaked gloom! "O God, who art Thou? What art Thou?" These are not their words; yet they are the words that steal from their hearts and grope beyond the frontier of human knowledge. From the grim and obscene gods of the past, man's marching intelligence has evolved a more kindly deity, a Divine Compassion. Yet still the High God is hidden behind altar-cloth, accessible to the laity only through priestly intercession. . . .

Presently I hear the tremor of a drum. Three times it beats, the echoes grumbling faintly among the tops of the pillars. I strain my eyes, watching the dim space beyond the chancel-rail. Now they come, the priests, a long line of robed figures entering through some door invisible to

me. I count them. . . . Fifteen . . . twenty-five. . . . They multiply like gray moths. At last the procession ends. Fifty monks in all, and they divide into a single-file column on either side and to the front of the altar.

Again three notes of the drum, the echoes mounting to the ceiling. It is the signal for two priests of a higher rank to enter, evidently bishops, for they wear robes of brocade and purple cloaks heavily crusted with gold. Tasseled vermilion cords, looped through amber rings, swing gently as they move toward the altar.

At last, announced by the sacred drum, comes the high priest, magnificent in brocades of crimson and gold, with a miter of the same stiff cloth upon his head.

He seats himself upon a lacquered throne below the altar; the other monks sink cross-legged upon cushions.

A gong is struck, that same gong whose mighty ring swallowed me once before, and a chanting service begins.

How splendidly primeval is this worship! The scene—the deep gloom, the film of incense, and the gorgeously panoplied ecclesiastics—is reminiscent of stirring ceremonies held a thousand years ago in giant temples hewn from nat-

ural rock and dedicated to Baal and Ashtaroth. It is the same primitive faith. The deification of an image fashioned in human form instead of the sun or the moon cannot change it. To make an invisible god plausible through symbolism is a practice immemorial and immortal. This service, then, is the configuration of a vague dream of beauty, the vision of a godhead surrounded by celestial splendors. What other dream, what other vision, can men know? . . .

And now the mass is over. The priests rise. Do I hear a drum, or is it a pounding in my temples caused by the suffocatingly sweet incense? The pontiff in crimson and gold leaves his throne and, attended by the purple-robed bishops, walks out slowly. The priests follow in long files of gray. The space behind the chancel-rail is deserted but for the dragon of incense coiling heavily on the burdened air.

Presently Father Sagata returns, and we move out in the clear sunlight. Behind, in the mauve gloom of the temple, the devout are still praying.

"Namu-amie-daibutsu . . ."

6

Kioto . . . Cool, crystal pool. . . . The traveler, having drunk, passes on. . . .

On the last day I made a farewell call upon my friend Father Sagata and wandered with him through the evergreen woods behind the Chion-in; I rode along the canals where strips of cloth, newly dyed, floated in the gliding water; and I visited the shops with their little brass gods, their peacock fans, their sandalwood and other inviting merchandise. I did not forget to buy some trifling gift for Aiko-san, and when I presented it at tiffin, explaining that I was to leave the next day, she assumed great distress. The Man-Who-Ate-So-Much was going away! To Nagasaki? Further?—across the huge sea and home? . . . He would never come back, never; and her heart, like a sparrow shut in a cage, would grieve itself to death. . . . A delightful little comedy she played, set to the music of ill-suppressed laughter.

That night I went to the restaurant of the bamboo tunnel, and, sitting in a private dining-room by the garden with its tiny waterfall and dripping gloom, I was served nameless foods swimming in soy-flavored sauces. Afterward, I spent half an hour in the glitter and glow of Theater Street and then returned to the hotel.

When I entered my room, a tiny figure curled up on a rug by the stove unrolled itself and be-

came a kimonoed doll whom I recognized as Aiko-san. She blinked at me drowsily, like a kitten aroused suddenly. Her little knot of varnished ebony hair was disheveled, and her *obi*—the purple one I had given her—was wrinkled and out of place. She bowed very low, as if to apologize for having been asleep and discovered in such disarray.

"It is a call of farewell," I said to myself; "and very thoughtful of her."

She had been waiting quite long for the Man-Who-Ate-So-Much, she informed me solemnly.

Indeed! Well, he was sorry he had kept her waiting.

To-morrow the Man-Who-Ate-So-Much was going away, she explained; she would miss him very much; and as he had given her many gifts . . .

Suddenly a tiny fear pricked me.

Ah, yes! I interrupted; and so she had come to bid him *Sayonara.*

Sayonara? she echoed. *Sayonara?*

And then the truth smote me. . . . Distressing, quite distressing! And only twelve or thirteen years old! It could not have been her own thought; perhaps one of the older maids. . . .

In sudden agitation I seized her to carry her

to the door, and she, misunderstanding, planted a moist kiss on my chin! . . . I set her on her feet in the hall and told her, in my most austere manner, to run as fast as her tiny feet could carry her and jump into her own bed. And I added, by way of being more severe, that it might be well to burn several joss-sticks to Amaterasu Omikami beforehand. With her profoundest bow, and an astonished look from eyes abnormally wide, she went pattering away down the corridor.

"Wash me clean of all my impurity, O Sun Goddess, as one washes away uncleanliness in the river of Kamo!"

As I prepared for bed I fancied, extravagantly, that I could hear a bell-like little voice intoning that ancient prayer.

Thus ends the idyl of Aiko-san.

EPISODE THE NINTH

I WALK WITH LOTI: A MOOD AT NAGASAKI

BEHIND lay the Inland Sea, a great foggy prison in which we had been confined for several days. Instead of the transparent blue realm that I had expected—gauzy skies and clear seas from whose depths sprang pygmy islands, fantastic as gnomes' castles—we glided through a spectral region haunted by vague ghost-isles and made more dismal by the moaning of a fog-siren. The drenching mists saturated me; my thoughts were moldy; and when, at last, we slipped out of that phantom world I felt like a cadaver restored to life. Now the ship furrowed the blue inlet of Nagasaki and the town unfolded; the town of Chrysanthème and Loti. It was inevitable that I should think of them as I approached the stage where they played their droll comedy of love. . . .

The great steamer swung into her anchorage, and a fleet of sampans assailed her, reinforced by numerous long barge-like boats laden with coal. Only a coaling-station, Nagasaki; by sunset the

ship, her black meal digested, would steam out of the harbor and into the China Sea.

Pressed by the realization that my time was limited, I hurried down the ladder and into a launch. As the small craft throbbed shoreward, past junks and boats with queer webbed sails, I gazed at the tiers of houses mounting the hills and wondered under which roof Chrysanthème and Loti had lived. The harbor, a long, narrow neck, was held in a green stronghold; slopes that rose, wooded and thickly built, above the water-front. Many vessels under foreign flags lay at anchor on the still indigo water.

At the dock an army of rickshaw-men besieged me. None spoke English, and I knew it would be hopeless to try to explain where I wished to go without an interpreter. An intelligent-looking Japanese was standing near-by, and I asked him if he would tell my coolie where to take me. He would be delighted; this in perfectly enunciated English; where did I wish to go?

There was a certain cemetery on the hill . . .

But there were many cemeteries up there, he interposed.

Yes, but this cemetery was behind a temple. To reach it one ascended through a series of

courts and climbed amid pagodas to a natural terrace inset with countless tombstones. It was there, I added, that the great novelist, Julien Viaud, called Pierre Loti, went often in quest of shade and solitude.

Ah, yes! He did not know this Viaud, called Loti, but he knew the cemetery; yes, he knew it now. . . .

I rattled across a bridge and into the narrow streets of the main town. The ground was muddy, the wheel-tracks thick with slush; and from this bed of ooze rose the damp, sour smell of soggy earth, a reek made more offensive by the odor of fish from markets lining the road. Tortoise-shell merchants beckoned to me from their doorways, and persistent venders of post-cards jogged along beside the rickshaw. The people, even, seemed to have absorbed the atmosphere; it was not a visible dirt that soiled them but something ingrained into their characters, a peculiar indefinable uncleanliness that underlay their yellow skins and looked out from gimlet-eyes.

Soon we left the bazaars and climbed toward the chaste summits rising incongruously from those depths of filth. On the flank of a hill, at the entrance of a temple, I descended from the

rickshaw, and, gesturing to the coolie to wait, moved up the granite steps, into the courtyard. I did not tarry there, for the surrounding walls and porticos had an air of decadence that was immediately depressing; I followed a path that led to the rear, to the foot of a climbing necropolis, which, though I had never seen it, was familiar instantly.

Tier upon tier of gray galleries swept upward in a somber amphitheater that hung over Nagasaki. Tiny stairways ascended under trees stooped with age and past an audience of small Buddhas and other stone images, losing themselves far above in that seemingly endless terrace of graves. What a vast place! And how ancient! The gnarled and crawling branches of the trees were mottled, like the skins of old men, and the tombstones were bearded with moss. Some of those gray obelisks must have been there for more than a century, I thought; and what sorrows they had seen, what dreadful mourning!

I went on toward the desolate heights. Little streams of water trickled over scaly rocks, moistening ferns and lichen and murmuring a liquid requiem. Foot-paths, soggy with muck and dead leaves, linked the miniature stairways,

winding between stones bearing strange letters and graves strewn with burnt-out joss-sticks and withered flowers.

At length, my leg-muscles numb, I sat down upon a slab of granite. From there I could see the town spread out in a patchwork of green and gray, and the harbor dreaming its perpetual dreams. But I did not feel exalted. My only sensation was loneliness, almost terror, at being isolated in that city of slant-eyed souls. The earth exhaled a damp breath, warm but unfriendly, and heavy with the odor of rotting plants. The air swooned with it, this odor of decay and death; an odor which, I realized with a startling sense of intimacy, Loti, too, had smelled, and which had filled him with the same dread. Loti, who was dead. . . . Sudden horror of the blotting out of my individual entity smote me. I rebelled against being absorbed by damp earth, reduced to the ignominy of nothing less than fecund soil from which fresh green plants sprang, and to which, their brief blooming finished, they withered back, odorous and dead, like the leaves at my feet. . . . Leaves destined to fertilize the unborn in a ceaseless and bewildering continuation of the whole by destruction of the individual. . . .

Loti (thus ran my melancholy thoughts), you, too, knew the doubts that come to me now; you who, in a spot far from this haunt of your youth, mingle your dust with the dust of Mother Earth. . . . Mother Earth! I wish that I could find some warmth, some affection in the inexorable soil! . . . I feel your spirit beside me, Loti, a spirit that, as it gazes upon Nagasaki, is filled with bitterness. For in the suburb of Dion-djen-dji, somewhere down there in the lavish greenery, is a doll-house whose fragile walls whisper, on windy nights, of a vain effort to heal soul-ache with the balm of love. And in that harbor, smooth and blue as a steel plate, you stood on the deck of your war-ship and gazed for the last time, gazed resentfully, at the abode of Chrysanthème. For she did not grieve for you. No. She counted the coins that you had given her during your brief marriage! But perhaps, Loti, that was the vengeance of Rarahu, golden Rarahu whom you left sobbing on the lonely beaches of Tahiti. . . .

Ah, Loti, what a philanderer! Rarahu, Aziyadé, Suleima, Chrysanthème . . . and how many more? "If you would know a country, fall in love with one of its women." That was your creed; and it reaped a song of anguish, of

thrilling tragedy, that tolls in my ears like the rich, mournful notes of a deep-throated bell. . . . A mystic without a faith, a pilgrim despairing of life and yet dreading death, what a somber road you must have walked! And yet how splendid! To feel the winds of exotic seas in your hair; to hear the soft music of palms; to see the blinding white of pagan temples burning in the sunlight! These sensations you sought, but they gave you no peace. The winds of adventure became poignant breaths from the lips of dying love, the music of palms a funereal strain; and the white temples were the bleached remains of religions in whose creeds and rituals you found no solace. Rarahu, Aziyadé, Suleima, Chrysanthème . . . none could lift the mournful burden of existence; and, stamped with a title of your own weaving, "The Book of Pity and Death," your most extravagant story, your life, came to an end. . . .

Ah, Loti, I would relinquish ambitious dreams, the security of respectable youth and genteel age, to follow the path of Romance! To wander and wander. To linger, dreaming, in forgotten corners of the earth. But I cannot. For I belong to the new world, the world you hated; a super-civilization of sky-raping towers and

roaring labyrinths; and I am trapped in it by instincts and circumstances too strong to break. I fear that I shall never know the beauty of idyllic love on some far, bright beach nor a golden Rarahu whose memory will haunt like the exquisite and melancholy fragrances of those garden-valleys on distant Tahiti. A slave of time, preëminently conventional; thus I shall live; and our only sure adventure in common is Death. . . .

I thought of all this as I sat in the cemetery above Nagasaki, the city where Loti dwelt with Chrysanthème. And I was depressed, for the world seemed a trap in which I, with other mortals, was caught, and from which there was but one certain escape. Perhaps it was the effect of the gray tombstones and the odors that rose from the damp, warm earth. But I would rather believe that, for a moment, I had walked with Loti.

I sat there for some time, my gaze brooding upon the blue water and the invisible suburb of Dion-djen-dji, buried in verdure somewhere below. Finally, burdened with infinite sadness, I rose and walked slowly down the series of gray steps, between the tombstones and the bowed cedars, past the little trickling streams of water, the

moist ferns, and the aged granite Buddhas, finding my way at length into the courtyard of the temple, and, eventually, into the city below.

Late that afternoon my steamer slipped out of the narrow inlet of Nagasaki. A red sun smote the mirror-blue sky; and numerous rays of light, sharp as fragments of broken glass, stabbed the hills and drowned them in a welter of blood. In the extravagant sunset, the harbor and the town had an air of anguish, as if reflecting the sorrows of that tortured pilgrim who had sojourned there.

EPISODE THE TENTH

IMPERIAL YELLOW

1

CHINA. Few are they who have not climbed the jade staircase of fancy to dreams spun by that word. . . . Ivory and cedar-wood and silks, and tall junks cargoed with spices and women. . . . The first time I saw its coast was in the early morning. The raw air of the north had been healed by soft tropical winds. To the landward a reflected hazy light smoldered on the sea, stretching, like a golden atrium, to the hills that bosomed the shore. Bare, somber hills, and brown as rust; the hills of Han. That they were part of China, a place so intimate in my fancy, seemed incredible, a thrilling mirage, result of the warm, heady sunlight that I drank in so fiercely. China! Ivory and cedar-wood and silks. . . . A sweet delirium stole into me. I yearned for extravagant adventure—a rôle in revolutionary intrigue or some equally preposterous hazard.

This pleasant madness lingered though the

morning; and when the ship swung into the roadstead of Hong-kong it was fed with new exhilaration. The harbor lay like a brilliant green arena in an amphitheater of encircling mountains; a watery stage where ships of the world, every manner of craft from armored cruisers to Chinese boats with bat-wing sails, were gathered in superb display. We docked at Kowloon, on the mainland; and across the way, moated by a narrow channel, rose the city of Hong-kong, the myriad buildings along the Bund deploying into tiers of houses as the town swept upward on a surge of green. Hanging over the city, like a great naked emotion towering above the artificiality of human existence, was the Peak, the highest of the band of mountains that coronals Victoria Island. It was thrilling, that vista; and it put a new whip and rhythm into my blood. Indeed, of all the ports that burn in my memory —harbors poignantly quiet, roadsteads active with shipping, bays of the tropics and of a colder hemisphere—none are as magnificent as Hong-kong.

As the ship warped in at the Kowloon docks, sampans drifted alongside, manœuvered by sexless-looking creatures whose shrill, attenuated voices proclaimed them women. In some of

the boats were bamboo cages overcrowded with squawking birds, yellow-crested cockatoos, and gray and pink parrots. It was a charming scene until I perceived that the sampan women were there for a twofold purpose, to salvage the swill emptied from the ship as well as to market their feathery merchandise. . . .

The dock was a place of clamor and chaos; shrill voices of the coolies, the rattle of man-propelled trucks and carts; naked yellow backs, flying legs, and swift hands that worked with the tie-lines and mooring-ropes. I sifted through this noisy sphere to the ferry-boat; glided across the channel to Hong-kong.

Spacious esplanades bordered the waterfront, and wide streets ran between stone buildings and narrow arcades—roads throbbing with an amazing traffic that seemed to have drawn into its pulse all the colors of East and West. Dark men from Coromandel and Ceylon. Bronzed men from Bombay. Yellow men from the interior provinces where sun and wind burnish the skin. Ivory men from the cities and coast towns. Pallid men from lands untouched by Oriental seas. . . . Tall Sikh policemen stood at the intersection of streets, no less proud than the white men who strode by with an air of conscious su-

periority; rickshaws raced past carrying blue-trousered Chinese women or little girls in brocaded jackets; and motor-cars, driven by Orientals, honked through this motley of beings and vehicles with startling incongruity. It was not Chinese; but I knew that behind this false front, built by homesick exiles, were quarters rich in the atmosphere of Cathay.

I found my way into Queen's Road, one of the main thoroughfares, and there, in a little side street that curved off into fragrant gloom, discovered a flower bazaar. Violets and hyacinths and roses! Other blossoms, too, fragile poems whose names I did not know. Generally I object to buttonhole decorations, whether flowers, flags, or pins; but the heavy sweetness of the curving street, the fresh, moist blossoms, thrice lovely after the bareness of winter Japan, smothered prejudice, and I bought a coral-pink rosebud for my lapel. This fastidious touch seemed, in some mysterious way, to qualify me for adventure.

I followed Queen's Road eastward, absorbing the warm green beauty of luxuriant trees; came at length to numerous barracks and drill-grounds. British troopers, tall fellows with sunburnt chests and bare tanned knees, were

playing cricket; and I realized how pleasant it was to see soldiers who were not yellow. Beyond the garrison, on a street that sloped up through green shadow, was the terminus of a tramway—the funicular tramway that connected with the Peak. This seemed, suddenly, the place I had been seeking subconsciously, and I boarded a waiting car, taking the front seat, which, a sign informed me, must be surrendered to his Excellency the Governor and his staff should they appear. . . .

Not often are my nerves affected by steep grades, yet I confess that I was disturbed as the car, drawn by a slender cable, groaned and screeched up that almost perpendicular incline; indeed, I felt actually concerned when it stopped at way-stations and, by merely lowering my eyes, I could look down upon a tiny slanting city that was Hong-kong. However, I managed to observe much of the scenery, the deep pools of greenery from which rose pretentious residences and over which numerous pink-blossomed trees broke in showers of rose-dyed rain.

The final stop was some distance from the Peak, and I set out on foot, in no wise displeased by the change of locomotion. The road led past the Peak Hotel and upward toward the fogged

summit; a steep, winding road that climbed between isolated dwellings and rocky, sparsely grown ravines. As I mounted I could see, over stone walls and descending billows of foliage, a miniature city and harbor below. The wind, sharpened by altitude, drove through my clothes with cruel force; wraiths of mist circled about me, rent into vaporous tatters by the capricious atmosphere. Near the top, which was hooded in fog, I stopped, crouching against a tall rock.

The cold, moist wind struck my face with the force of a damp rag; it swept around the Peak, a palpable wild presence that lashed the mist into fantastic shapes and drove it into gullies and crevices where it lay like cotton wadding. The city and the roadstead, seen between layers of vapor, seemed immeasurably distant and ineffectual; a symbol of the futility of Civilization against the forces of Nature. I felt both exhilarated and depressed. The Peak, in my imagination, became the symbol of China, rising, superbly indifferent, above the encroaching sphere of white men; and, suddenly, I felt in close community to the dreams of a race that had always seemed inscrutable to me. For thousands of years that lofty summit had endured, tortured by wind and storm, gazing upon in-

trigue and famine and plague and war, yet remaining unaffected beyond minor surface corrosions and a change of exterior appearance with the seasons. Tartar, Mongol, Ming, and Manchu, all had come and gone, each tolerated for a brief period and then crushed. What an impervious monster, this China! Now the victim of internal wars, of jealous Nippon and scheming Occidental nations, would she not endure them for a spell and then . . . smite them?

I did not stay long in that exalted spot, for the air was too rare, the wind too sharp, and the perspective too vast; and when I went down I felt like an ant crawling over some petrified monster.

2

And now the story of Chang Yuan. . . .

I first saw him in the Pennsylvania Station in New York, a slender burnished figure lost in the cold magnificence of marble walls and heavily glassed ceilings. His dark Occidental clothes only accentuated the Oriental mold of his features; smooth, handsome features that in some imperceptible way suggested aristocratic blood. He attracted me instantly, for he should have been robed in plum-colored silk and borne in a

sedan-chair along the streets of some far flowery city. It was only by the chance of twelve letters on my grip that we met. I paused, ostensibly to look at some papers I was carrying but really to study him, perhaps with a view to weaving him into a story, and to my surprise he approached me. He had just arrived from the west, he informed me after apologizing for speaking, and he was to have been met by some one who had not appeared, a gentleman from Philadelphia. As he had seen "Philadelphia" printed on my bag, he presumed that I lived there and wondered if I knew Mr. —— It was very naïve. And it was the beginning of a brief acquaintance that was delightfully novel. I directed him to a hotel and helped him to find his friend; and before I left the city we dined and went to the theater together. A most charming person he was, rather poetic and astonishingly well educated in a Victorian fashion. His home was in Hong-kong, he told me, and he had come to the United States to attend a university for two years; a finishing touch to the education received at a foreign college in China. After that he would return home. Should I ever come to Hong-kong I must let him know. . . . His name —well, Chang Yuan.

And so, soon after I arrived in Hong-kong, I wrote him a note; and the following day he appeared, not clad in plum-colored silk as I hoped, but wearing a gray European suit. I had feared the effect of a foreign college upon him, but he proved to be the same delightfully archaic person, with only an added air of extreme dignity, faintly grandiose; the result of being in native surroundings again.

That evening we had dinner at a European hotel and afterward went out to "view the night side of the city," as he expressed it. Red rickshaws whirled us westward along Queen's Road, past the arcaded shops and into the tremulous heart of the native town. In the lighted doorways stood citron-yellow Chinamen; others sat within, smoking and talking; still others lounged on the balconies of the four-storied houses. A stream of people surged in endless procession through the streets. The whisper of bare feet and sandals, the *clap-clap* of leather soles, the ebb and flow of voices, some raucous, some murmurous, melted into a ceaseless muffled clamor; the strange rhythmical restlessness that measures off the dark hours in China and throbs eternally in the memory of those who once hear it. The streets—bright-lanterned thoroughfares, bar-

baric with banners and crawling ideographs; narrow side alleys graduated into steps and climbing to who knows what adventures—seemed troughs for this flowing nocturne.

We went to a native theater first.

"I apologize for bringing you here," said Chang in his dignified manner as we alighted from our rickshaws. "It is a third-class place. I shall take you to a second-class theater next, then to a first-class. Thus you shall rise by degrees through the Chinese drama and see it in all forms."

The moment our feet touched the pavement, beggars besieged us, filthy creatures who materialized from dark corners as if by some horrid sorcery and came mewling toward us with extended rotted arm-stumps. With an imperial "Chella!" my Chinese friend sent them slinking away, chimeras whose unspeakable deformities haunted me persistently.

As we entered the theater a nauseous effluvia breathed out of the darkness. The odorous gloom was mottled with faces, and beyond the spotted pit that was the audience, in a burst of light from numberless oil-lamps, were creatures so weirdly unreal that they seemed extravagant paper figures cut out of an illustrated book of

mythological tales; men with horned helmets and sweeping black beards, accoutred with amazing *papier-mâché* armor and weapons; and slender porcelain-like women with blanched faces, vermilion lips, and tall auriole-shaped head-dresses. On one side of the stage, incongruously clad in modern dress, were musicians who beat cymbals and drums in a crashing accompaniment to the shrill voices of the actors. There was a grotesque pretense of scenery in a backdrop which was not sufficiently wide and permitted glimpses of mysterious individuals who wandered on and off the rear of the stage. It was all so primitive, so incredibly barbaric, that I was bewildered.

Chang led me down a side aisle, explaining that he was going to initiate me into the backstage atmosphere of a third-rate theater. We plunged into a tunnel-like corridor that reeked of latrine smells; mounted slippery stone steps; came out in a dim space lined with curtained stalls. Chang pulled back one of the curtains, gesturing contemptuously toward a figure curled up in a bunk.

"They sleep, eat, and live here, like cattle in a stable," he informed me with perceptible disgust. "Indeed, they are not as clean as cattle; they are dung."

In a sphere of fetid gloom behind the backdrop stood a crowd of Chinese watching the performance from the rear; actors were changing their costumes in the orange flare of oil-lights, and I perceived that those whom I had thought women, the vermilion-lipped creatures with the tall aurioles, were young men or boys. I asked Chang if there were no actresses in China, and he replied that there were a few but they were not popular.

"My people," he said, "do not like to see women on the stage, and some even disapprove of their presence in theaters. Many of the new playhouses, like this one, for instance, have special galleries for women, but the older ones have no accommodation for them. I prefer the country theaters," he remarked, "where performances are in the open. This place"—with a deprecating gesture—"is patronized only by common people. The play is cheap—what you call vulgar melodrama. It is a *wu* or military play. That type of performance is always accompanied by much gong-beating."

For a few minutes we watched the exaggerated mimicry of the actors, then retraced our steps through the mottled gloom and out into comparatively clean air.

The next theater, although second-class, seemed to me no better than the first; there were the same reeks, the same deafening clamor of cymbals and strident falsetto voices. The third, however, was vastly superior. Both audience and actors obviously were higher types. The play, Chang explained, was a *p'i-huang,* or musical drama, and was, as always, accompanied by a *lo,* flute, and *hu-Ch'in,* a sort of violin. The costumes were of silk and brocade, and weighted with gold braid and false jewels. The fact that the actors who were supposed to be dead rose and walked off the stage, only one incongruity among many, did not seem to amuse the audience, nor, apparently, even my American-educated host. We stayed through one play which was brief and in two acts. In China, plays generally are very short, and several make up a program, often each using the same scenery; hence the illusion among the majority of foreigners that Chinese plays, like those of Japan, are interminably long.

After visiting the theaters we went into Queen's Road West as far as Belcher Street, a quarter which Chang told me was very vicious. And certainly the atmosphere could not be called celestial. There, against a background of bril-

liantly lighted restaurants and shops, moved the bloated, sensual Chinese merchants of fiction, the cat-like slayers who slither across the pages of scarlet melodrama, and the tiny, rice-powdered, red-lipped girls who, in stories, love and are loved by lily-tongued young Orientals who solve their mutual difficulties—and there are difficulties always—by poisoned wine or some other passport to oblivion. It was a place wickedly thrilling, a quarter such as I had read of in my extreme youth, and it did not fail to supply the necessary touch, an incident of melodramatic realism.

I noticed a crowd gathering at a corner, and I signaled my coolie to stop; Chang did the same. Over the heads of numerous Chinamen I could see two who seemed the center of attention, tall Mongolian-looking youths who stood facing each other with the calm tenseness that is anger intensified. Behind one was a girl, evidently the cause of the quarrel—a tiny creature with black bangs and a braided pigtail. For a moment after we paused there was taut silence; then one of the angry men hissed an anathema which Chang translated.

"Sai-a-nei! . . ."

"Tue-nei-amah!" whipped back the other.

And then they crashed together in a careen-

ing deformity of legs and arms. The crowd receded. I observed a tall Sikh policeman hurrying toward the scene of disturbance. But he was too late. Suddenly one of the fighters vanished from my sight; the other, drawing slobbery breaths, wiped a garnet-red smear from over his eyes, and I saw a knife in his hand. . . . The crowd parted before the towering Sikh.

"Come," Chang urged.

At a command from him the coolies leaped forward, and we were jerked swiftly out of an affair that gave an added sense of uncertainty to the quarter.

We were now in "Kennedy Town," or, as the police know it, District No. 1. On either side were four-story buildings, balconied and bannered; and from blazing restaurants came the clashing panner of cymbals.

Pan-pan-pan-pan-pang! Pan-pan-pan-pan-pang!

They went on without ceasing, clashing and crashing; and their metallic vibrations set the air to quivering wildly.

Pan-pan-pan-pan-pang! Pan-pan-pan-pan-pang!

I hear them now, tintillating disks of sound that spin through my memory; and I see the

gorgeous wickedness of that quarter; the bursts of orange and crimson light; the gilded façades of the buildings; the little girls in brocaded coats and satin trousers. . . . Mauve and vermilion, azure and sable, gamboge and gold; polychromous confusion. . . .

It was inevitable that we should visit an opium house. The place was at the end of a slinking alley near the grape-green lamps of Belcher Street; a narrow lane that coiled between high walls and illuminated doorways like a black adder whose poison-fangs were the flame-tongued lights in that dive where a few wretches lay drugged in mephitic gloom. The acrid air of the place stung my nostrils; and the soiled bunks, the dirty walls, were cruelly drab. It was n't picturesquely evil; it was as colorless as naked lust; and it left in my brain a negative often developed and printed with tragic sharpness upon my imagination.

Of course, a glimpse of the brothels was included in this excursion. They, like the opium houses, were depressing; tawdry places, opening directly upon the street, with ornate scrolls on the walls and narrow curtained recesses. In each was an altar dedicated to the god of pleasure, and the air was rich with the mingled odors of incense

and opium, alive with coiling drifts of blue smoke. The girls, some with spots of scarlet on their eyelids, wore the usual brocaded jackets and trousers. Chang explained, in his grandiose manner, that they were called *loquiia,* and their duties consisted, among other things, of singing and playing to patrons and filling their opium pipes. . . . A most courteous host, this Chang Yuan, displaying toward the world a lofty superiority and toward me a flattering intimacy. Indeed, in spite of his tweeds, he was a most picturesque person, and I was curious to know something of his manner of living, his environment and intimate thoughts.

It was after midnight when we moved back through Queen's Road West, into the area of the pannering cymbals, and Chang suggested supper at the To-Yuen Restaurant. We were led up-stairs by an attendant, past swinging doors and into a private dining-room on the second floor. The walls were over-embellished, the furniture oppressively European. On one side a balcony overhung dark water and the scattered lights of junks and ocean-going craft, and, on the other, windows yielded a view of a wide gallery across the way where marionettes were being worked to attract passers-by and musicians

struck cymbals with fiendish persistency. The metallic dissonance had beat itself into my blood, into my brain, and I felt my sanity being pounded to powder. I wondered how I could endure the wild clamor for the length of time required to eat a Chinese meal.

Chang sent for two singsong girls, which was the proper thing to do, and they arrived coincident with the first course. One was Miss Lai Tsien, and the other Miss Yin Hom; queer, impassive little dolls with black bangs cutting severely across the intense pallor of their faces and tiny mouths that suggested slashed crimson berries. Miss Lai Tsien wore a coat of lilac brocade and Miss Yin Hom a jacket of blue silk; and gold ear-rings dripped from their porcelain-pale ears. Singsong girls, like the geisha of Japan, are professional entertainers and are an institution at such restaurants as the To-Yuen. They live in adjacent houses and come at the call of patrons. If a Chinese gentleman wishes to assume intimate relationship with a singsong girl he pays for her service at some restaurant once or twice, and then, when they have become better acquainted, the transaction is concluded at a time and place mutually agreed upon. If, later, he becomes enamoured of her and desires

her as his wife or concubine, he buys her from her mistress. . . .

While we consumed innumerable delicacies such as bird's-nest soup, shark's fins, roast duck-skin, and pigeon-eggs, Miss Lai Tsien and Miss Yin Hom stood behind our chairs or sat on the arms and clapped two wooden blocks together in sharp accompaniment to falsetto singing; all this given increased barbarity by the infernal and eternal pannering of the cymbals. Miss Yin Hom, a charming little creature whose bisque composure sheathed a rather whimsical nature, sang a ballad in Pidgin for my benefit:

"Wat-tim he almon' flower hab white when peach-tlee
blongey pink,
My smokey opium-pipe, galaw, an' muchee tim' my tink
'Bout allo pidgin China-side no fan-kwei understand,
In olo Fei-Chaw-Shang inside—my nicee Gleen Tea
Land!"

Which was explained to me as being "one piecee singsong Californee side by China-boy solly inside. . . ."

I regret to say that before we quitted the To-Yuen my host had taken on a distressing quantity of rice-wine. But it did not affect his decorum; he was, in fact, more imperial than ever, and he

informed me with exaggerated graciousness that I was to be his guest every evening during my stay.

"And before you depart," he added mysteriously, "I shall tell you a story—a story which you must write and call 'Imperial Yellow'—yes, that must be the title; for it is a story of the Forbidden City."

It was something of a shock to see him thus, but his persistent dignity saved me from total disillusion.

About two o'clock we left—to my intense relief. As we came out of the restaurant a boy, his skin mottled by some scrofulous disease, attached himself to us and followed to the rickshaws, making horrible throaty sounds.

"Fontina," Chang explained with contempt. "He is crazy."

Then he hissed a few words to the idiot, and the boy, with a terrified glance at the policeman standing at his post in the street, fled, gibbering and screaming, into an alleyway.

It was a last grim touch to the evening, and the sounds of the idiot's cries, set to the wild crashing of the cymbals, followed me back through muffled streets.

3

"Politics," declared Chang Yuan, "should never be discussed by friends."

Several nights had passed since our excursion into the Chinese city, and we were seated on the forward deck of the Hong-Kong-Kowloon ferry waiting to be transported to the Victoria shore. Bright stars, far-sown over the sky, reaped a harvest in the black harbor below: tiny, twinkling reflections that danced among the tremulous lights of anchored vessels; and the city was a nest of luminous flies whose glowing troops deployed up the mountain-side to the very frontier of the stars.

"And yet if I do not speak after you have requested an expression of my views, I shall be guilty of an act of discourtesy," he continued in a manner charmingly Oriental.

"But why do you think I would be displeased by what you have to say?" I pressed.

"The story of Chinese politics is an indictment against Western diplomacy," he replied simply.

"Against America?"

"No, not against America as a nation, but against the civilization of which she is a part; a

civilization that has progressed to an exquisite point in the art of killing; a civilization of Science."

"But China had a civilization when Rome was a barbarian empire," I reminded.

"Yes," he said, "but it was a civilization of Art. It was fundamentally different from Western civilization; different even in small details. For instance, we used, and do use, ideograms instead of an alphabet. In the past, Confucian ethics took the place of religion; that is, among the middle and upper classes. This doctrine, briefly summarized, taught self-restraint, moderation, and courtesy. Our government was a form of patriarchal theism, and the family system was the basis upon which society was built. The governing officials were scholars chosen for their intellectual qualifications; the power of mind was honored and not the strength of thews and biceps. It was a rule of the *literati*. The West was, and is, the antithesis of this; yet she has always judged China by her own standards. And when China failed to qualify she penalized her—heavily.

"Consider the history of China," he went on. "Conquered and reconquered, and weakened by international brigandage! The Mongols, the

Mings, the Manchus; all have ruled—and have been absorbed. *Absorbed.* You perceive? In the past, when China overthrew her conquerors she did not cast them aside; she assimilated them. It was not strange, then, with such a mixture of races, that in 1911, after the revolution, she was stricken with—with national indigestion, as it were. And the medicine of foreign intercession has, unfortunately, done little to relieve the congestion."

He looked at me inquisitively, apologetically, as if expecting me to resent his assertion and pleading innocence of any desire to offend.

"There is always a disorderly element in China," he said when I urged him to go on, "ready to loot and plunder. But generally the various communities can attend to them. However, at present, the people are defenseless against the armed outlawry of the *tuchuns'* armies. The *tuchuns,* you understand, are the military governors. China, of course, can only be saved by herself. But the Western powers can assist in the matter of the *tuchuns'* armies: they can demand that these troops disband on the grounds that foreign interests as well as foreign people are being menaced by this continual state of civil war. Thus, with comparatively little ef-

fort on the part of Western nations, China could be ridded of one of the evils that blocks reconstruction. Many prominent officials in both Peking and Canton advocate this move, but they do not publicly declare themselves for fear the Western powers will fail to go through with the program and they will be left at the mercy of the *tuchuns.*"

With a muffled swish and throb the ferry-boat glided away from the landing and toward the shore where Hong-Kong hung like a cloud of black mist loaded with fireflies. A damp vapor rising from the channel wrapped me about with silken coolness; it collected in visible aureolas about the deck-lamps and contributed a velvety softness to the surrounding darkness.

Chang Yuan continued:

"There is, paradoxical as it may seem, a fundamental unity among the people because of the fact that about eighty per cent. are agriculturists. Government means to them, not a capital, a president, or an emperor, but the province, the city, and the family—with the family preëminent. Even at the time when Manchu despotism was at its height, the wishes of the people were respected; if a viceroy sent by the Dragon Throne was disapproved by the populace he was gener-

ally removed. When their household, the sacred institutions of the family, were menaced, they rose. That was the case in 1911 when the Manchus were overthrown. I am a Manchu, but I recognize that their rule had become corrupt. In short, the dynasty had exhausted the mandate of Heaven. After the revolution, the emperor was not executed, as would have been the procedure in Europe, but was permitted to remain on the Dragon Throne within the sacred precincts of the Imperial City and supported by an income of four million dollars a year. In fact, it was by a decree of the Throne that the Republic was declared. The President, later, issued a proclamation commanding that his Majesty, a child at the time, be given 'due courtesy, but not fealty and obedience. . . .' Thus custom was preserved without the new rule's being affected, and China became a republic; a republic with an emperor held in reserve.

"Immediately the new régime was established, it borrowed the form of government used by America, not stopping to consider that it might not be consistent with the Chinese character. And the result? We found that a mere change of government was not enough; it had to be a change to a government which the masses could

understand and one administered in a way to which they were accustomed. The people, not yet awakened to a centralized authority after years of provincial rule, neglected national interests, mainly because of their ignorance of the new form of government; and corrupt officials took advantage of the situation, misusing their power and depleting the treasury and resources of the country. During the presidency of Yuan Shi-k'ai national affairs were comparatively peaceful, but immediately after his attempt to become emperor the present state of perpetual revolution started. That was the beginning of the tyranny of the *tuchuns*.

"You spoke of the 'two governments' when you asked my unworthy opinion of the situation. . . . Ah! If there were only two governments our troubles would be simplified! But there are so many factions: the Peking powers, the Cantonese constitutionalists, the Japanese, the various foreign interests, and numerous small military groups and robber bands. China at present is, indeed, like a great giant tied down by pygmies. That 'great giant' is the people—the men and women who till the soil, who weave and spin, who trade; the millions who know vaguely that there is trouble between North and South, that the

Japanese are trying to absorb the country, that foreign greed is adding to the havoc; but who do not understand beyond the mere realization that the sacred institutions of the family are being threatened. When they are awakened—and they are stirring now, harried by soldiers and brigands—the giant will rise and crush its pygmy tormentors. Without a leader, however, that effort will result only in more chaos, and ultimately China will be dominated by Japan or become a vassal of Western powers."

We were in mid-channel; and, in front, the Peak rose out of the nebulous vapor that was Hong-Kong, burying its crest in gloom. Again, as on the day of my arrival, it seemed a symbol of China, a great monster brooding over an encroaching civilization. It was incredible that such a Cyclops should ever become enslaved. . . .

"Under a dictator," Chang explained, "some one man forceful enough to destroy the tyranny of bureaucracy, China could be given a breathing-spell in which to build up her finances and heal the wounds left by internal wars; and, thus developed by her own people and transformed from a collection of feudatory provinces into a united nation, she would be sufficiently

strong to combat Japanese oppression alone. When I say 'combat' I do not mean to fight actually, for it is my unworthy opinion that China united would be formidable enough to dissipate Japan's dreams of expansion in Asia. The difficulty at present is in finding the proper man. It is interesting to conjecture who he might be. One of the *tuchuns* themselves? There are several eligible. General Wu Pei Fu, the liberal military leader, is master of the Yang-tse section and a powerful figure in northern politics. He and Chang Tso-lin fought the An Fu Club together, but later they broke and became enemies. In fact, Wu forced Chang to resign from his post as inspector-general of Manchuria. Chang is trying to reassert his power, but he will never have the support of the people, for he was a *hung-hu-tzee*—an outlaw—and rose to eminence through Japanese influence.

"In the South, Cheng Chuing Ming is an important general. At one time he and Sun—Dr. Sun Yat Sen—were allied, but it is reported that Sun dismissed him; whatever the cause, the fact remains that they are no longer colleagues. If Sun fails, Cheng will undoubtedly swing into greater prominence in the South. Sun is an

enigma. Some say he is an opportunist; others declare he is an ardent patriot. Who knows the truth? There have been rumors of an agreement between him and Chang-Tso-lin. If this is true he will lose much support.

"When speaking of the North a moment ago I neglected to mention Tsao Kun, the President. But he is an unlikely prospect, as it is well known that he is a tool of the powers. That finishes the list of possible dictators. There is, however, another force to be considered, a monarchist element whose hopes are invested in the young emperor. While he is virtually a prisoner in the Imperial Palace, his influence extends over a great portion of the North and even down into the South. The people have not forgotten that he is Lord of Ten Thousand Years; and reports from within the Forbidden City say that he is vitally interested in politics and is an extremely capable boy. In the event that all other means fail in casting off the *tuchuns,* there will undoubtedly be an attempt to invest his Majesty with the actual power of his office. And I am not sure that the country might not rally under the Dragon Flag. . . .

"And so you perceive that the problems of China are many. In the interior is the Great

Wall, and along the coast is the wall of foreign influence; one a symbol of the past, the other a threat of the future. Hong Kong"—with a gesture toward the climbing lights—"is one of the turrets, so to speak, in that alien bulwark. Its acquisition by the British was no worse than similar seizures made by other nations; it is simply an example of the international piracy that China has suffered for two centuries. Some time before 1842 certain British traders living at Canton were persecuted by the citizens and driven out. They fled to Macao, but ill-feeling persisted, and they were forced to take refuge at Hong-Kong. It was all very deplorable, but the penalty was too severe. Promptly the island was occupied by an expeditionary force; and at the end of hostilities it was granted to England.

"That was in 1842. Ten or twelve years later France and England together made war on China, and during the fighting at Peking their troops destroyed the Summer Palace, an edifice as magnificent as any cathedral demolished in the recent European War. There was nothing to justify this act of barbarism. It was simply part of the ruthless inquisition of the civilization of Science upon the civilization of Art. As a

consequence of that war, seven more ports were opened to trade, also the Yang-tse; a huge indemnity was paid, and more territory was ceded to Great Britain—namely, Kowloon.

"The inquisition continued. Later an Englishman was murdered through no fault of the Government, and because of his death an indemnity together with a fixed tariff was obtained. . . . Then the French seized Annam. . . . Britain took Burma. Both belonged to the ancient empire. Then came the war with Japan, the loss of Korea, of Manchuria. . . . Later, two German missionaries were killed in Shan-tung. Accordingly, Germany claimed Kiao-chau Bay and secured railway and mining interests in the province where the two missionaries were murdered. . . . Even Russia came in for her share in the empire: she made a naval base out of Port Arthur; and England, not to be outdone, took Wei-hai-wei. . . ."

We had reached the Hong-Kong docks, and the tawny lights of the city stretched away on either side, like flecks of rust on a sheet of gunmetal. The ferry-boat warped in with a great churning of water.

"As a climax," said Chang Yuan, rising, "came the Boxer Rebellion, and the Allies sacked

Peking, demanded and received a large indemnity, and further intrenched themselves in China by turning the Legation Quarter into a fortified city. . . . And thus," he finished in his polite, imperial manner, "was proved the superiority of Science over Art."

4

Evidently Chang Yuan's extravagant assertion that I was to be his guest every evening was not the result of too much rice-wine, or, if it was, he was sufficiently sober to realize what he was saying and later make good his words. Each afternoon at tea-time he appeared, suggesting some new expedition; in fact, his invitations were so numerous, his hospitality so prodigal, that I was embarrassed. However, I realized that it was an example of true Eastern graciousness, and to have refused would have been regarded, by him, as an expression of discourtesy. Chang, like all high-class Chinese, was quite punctilious in the matter of etiquette. His early training according to Confucian methods, particularly the custom of self-effacement, had survived more than two years spent in the West. Indeed, I was surprised that he persisted in

wearing European clothes. In his dress he was an exquisite, and I could imagine that, had he chosen to effect native costume, his appearance would have been elegant in the extreme. His tweed suits never ceased to irritate me.

He was exceptionally friendly, and we discussed a diversity of subjects with freedom: yet always I felt that he was withholding his actual thoughts, that he would never be wholly candid because of the ineffaceable act that I was a white man. Whenever he spoke of his family it was in a rather indefinite way; only once did he refer to his home, and then his remark was merely a vague hint that he lived somewhere among the mountain-side villas hanging over Hong-Kong. This, together with his lavish expenditure of money, indicated that he was wealthy; and my fancy pictured his father as a retired court official who had escaped the revolution with a fortune squeezed from the people during the despotic latter years of the Manchu dynasty. Chang became, in my eyes, a most mysterious figure; mysterious, not inscrutable. For he was not enigmatical, as the Chinese are believed to be; he was simply uncommunicative—the inevitable Oriental accepting the foreigner with reservations.

Three days before I was to leave Hong-Kong, Chang invited me to go to Macao, an old Portuguese-Chinese city on the island of Heung Shan, some forty miles across the estuary of the Canton River. The name 'Macao,' or, to give the town its full title, 'Cidade do Santo Nom de Deus de Macao,' has always held a wicked allure for me. . . . Baize-topped tables; clinking cash . . . the opulent fume of poppy-smoke. . . . It is there that the most notorious gambling-houses in the Orient slumber by day and purr by night. And from the great brass caldrons of its opium factories pours a ceaseless stream of black treacle that flows around the world. . . .

From Hong-Kong to Macao is a three- or four-hour run; and our ship, a steamer that made regular trips, shook off the mists of Victoria, like a moth discarding a damp cocoon, and luxuriated in the golden fulgor of a sun-warmed sea. Forward, iron grilles protected the companionways leading to the engines. These, Chang explained, were a precaution against pirates. Only a week or two before, he went on to say, a boat coming in from the Portuguese colony had been seized, the passengers locked in the cabins, and the ship looted and set adrift.

. . . It sounded rather splendid; indeed, I could fancy the exquisite thrill put into motion by the sudden appearance of a pirate junk on that agate-smooth sea.

On the lower deck were numberless coolies, the majority naked to the waist, their great salient muscles given an oily glisten by the sunlight; all bound for the gambling colony, inflamed by dreams of fan-tan and opium and little girls with blood-carmine lips. . . . Bare-breasted islands lay drowsing in the pure silence: flecks of dust on a great, flawless blue pearl. . . . There was, on our deck, a Chinaman clothed after the manner of a Cantonese gentleman. He wore a long black robe, slashed at the sides and buttoned, and a black silk skullcap. Under the outer garment was a full blue skirt. His Oriental attire gave him a dignity that even Chang, with all his regal manners, could not equal; and I remarked to my friend that I rather fancied the native dress of his country. He seemed surprised.

"Yes? Had I known that, I would not have changed to European clothing. You see," he explained, "it is—how do the French say it?—*défendu?*—it is *défendu* for a white man to associate with a Chinese gentleman in Hong-

Kong; at least, according to the British. So, for your sake, I cast aside my national costume temporarily."

I felt that I knew him well enough to discuss a delicate matter, and so I dropped a probing question in regard to the relationship between white and yellow in Hong-Kong.

"Analyzed, it is simply a matter of the difference in the color of the skin," he said candidly. "Coolie or high official, the discrimination, fundamentally, is slight. Socially, in diplomatic circles, the high official is accepted, but one Englishman never fails to apologize to the other for the fact. Race-consciousness is very highly developed in the British—but no more than in the Chinese. We have not forgotten our heritage."

Macao first appeared as an ivory-pale blur in the blue haze; then, gradually, it seemed carved out of the misty diffusion of reflected sunlight, asserting itself in green and silver substantiality —a semicircle of pygmy houses and gardens overlooking a half-moon bay. On a full-bosomed promontory at one end of the town stood a lighthouse, an immaculate sentinel poised above the mellow-hued stucco buildings.

Immediately upon landing we took rickshaws

along the Praia Grande and through the European and Chinese quarters. In the former were many splendid dwellings and gardens thick with subtropical plants; many fountains, too, gurgling and fuming in the voluptuous sunshine. A rather sensuous place, this Macao. Particularly the Chinese quarter. Through narrow, tortuous streets and between low houses; past gilded, vermilioned theaters and gambling-palaces moved sleepy-eyed beings, some of whom were pure Chinese or Portuguese but most of whom were Nhons; that is to say, a mixture of both. These Nhons, said Chang, speak a Portuguese patois and call themselves subjects of Portugal; in fact, many full-blooded Chinese do the same for business reasons.

As we rode through the town that afternoon, I was surprised to see a familiar black-swathed figure moving somberly against a moss-grown wall—a Christian nun. Her shadow wavered along the street behind her, frail as an illusion; and in the brutal white glare she looked so pallid, her skin so transparent that she seemed more like a symbol than a woman; a symbol that, in this yellow country, was an expression of tragic futility. . . . And just before dusk (the sky blooming a brilliant hue) I heard the pealing

of chimes: transparent rose-petals of sound that scattered through the dying sunset and withered. There was something wistful and lonely in the music, a note mournfully intimate, and it took me back to my own country, to a little town in the mountains, where each autumn the forests rust and die, and cathedral chimes toll with heartbreaking melancholy. . . .

After nightfall, when a tiara of lights crowned the bay, Chang led the way to a very exclusive establishment where glazed-paper lanterns, heavily ideographed, proclaimed its purpose. The interior presented a scene soaked in thick aqueous blue smoke and enriched by the pungent odor of opium. Around a large table on the lower floor were crowds of middle-class Chinese, swimming in the weird smoke-light like the inhabitants of some undersea cavern. Above, hovering over the encircling rail of a gallery, were a multitude of faces floating in the gloom like misshapen moons. There, said Chang, indicating the faces, were the high-class patrons. Accordingly, we joined them, escorted thither by an attendant. A most elegant assembly crowded this upper floor, all men, and dressed in silks and brocades, some standing by the rail, lowering their bets to

the table below by means of a basket, and others lounging upon divans, drinking tea or inhaling poppy-smoke. The air staggered with the combined richness of opium-fumes and pomaded humanity.

Several Chinese gentlemen politely made room for us at the rail, and we gazed down at the beings who swarmed around the table. Piles of coins glimmered through the blue smoke, like sunken treasure. Moving lithely among the gamblers were satin-trousered courtezans who now and then lifted blanched faces to us. It looked very wicked and very pleasant, and it stung my blood with challenge. Many times during the following two hours I lowered the basket and drew it up empty; and many times Chang ordered whisky-sodas. . . .

Somewhere near midnight (I am sure it was midnight, for that is the propitious hour for bizarre happenings) Chang suggested that we repair to a private room where he had ordered supper served; the cook connected with this establishment prepared a faultless birds'-nest pudding. . . . In the room were two ebony divans, and Chang explained that frequently patrons remained overnight. A window opened toward

the sea, which was hidden behind roofs, and in the soft darkness that thickened above the reflected glare of street-lamps were sprinkled the phosphorescent ashes of stars.

My host insisted on having whisky and soda with the supper. It was rather distressing, as long ago I had ceased to count the drinks he had taken. In justice to him, however, I must add that he contained them with astonishing ease. Oh, a magnificent personage, this Chang Yuan! He was like a figure out of Romance; and he remained so until the end. . . .

Suddenly, and quite abruptly, he drew a photograph from an inside pocket and extended it to me.

"This is my grandmother," he said simply.

It was a picture that I had seen often, that I recognized instantly. Sitting on a throne, against the background of a magnificently carved screen and flanked by tall peacock-feather fans, was an austere old woman, wearing full embroidered robes and a *Gu'un Dzan,* as a Manchu lady's head-dress is called.

"I see," I commented politely, tasting of bitter disillusion, for I had never expected to behold Chang Yuan in a state of such lofty intoxication

that he would claim the late empress dowager as his grandmother!

"I carry it with me always," he explained, quite seriously, "as a talisman. It brings me good luck."

He leaned across the table, in his sloe-black eyes the first animation I had ever seen him display.

"Do you remember I said that I had a story for you? . . . Well, I shall tell you now; and some time you must write it and call it 'Imperial Yellow.' Will you? You promise? . . . And you will promise also," he pursued, "that my name shall never be mentioned? . . . I trust you. You are my friend. That is why I tell you this. I am a descendant of the Yehonala clan, which began in the region of the Long White Mountain, the cradle of Manchu aristocracy. Lao Tzu Sang, the Great Ancestor" —gesturing toward the photograph, lying face upward on the table—"was my grandmother. But my grandfather was not the emperor, her husband, Hsien-feng. I do not know who my grandfather was. Perhaps Jung Lu, an officer of the Imperial Guards; or the eunuch An Ti-hai, who was not a eunuch; or Li Lien-ying, who

also falsely called himself a eunuch. I cannot say which. But my father believes that the head eunuch, An Ti-hai, fathered him into existence. Perhaps."

I knew that there was gossip about the late empress dowager and her two head eunuchs, An Ti-hai and Li Lien-ying; also it was a well-known and widely chronicled fact that her majesty had been enamoured of her handsome young guardsman, Jung Lu. Indeed, there was talk (and writing, too) of a child that had been smuggled out of the Forbidden City. . . . But Chang Yuan! The faultless Chang Yuan! Surely he was drunk or romancing. . . .

A "boy" brought more whisky and another siphon, and Chang Yuan drank. The expression in his eyes had become hazy and introspective. It may have been only an illusion, but I thought I saw him sway slightly.

"Grandson of her Majesty T'zu Hsi An, Empress of the West," he resumed, fingering his glass. "She was called Lao Fu Yeh, the Great Old Buddha. Women are not often great. But Yehonala, the Old Buddha. . . . She began her career as a concubine; and when she died her full title was T'zu-Hsi-Tuan-yu-K'ang-yi-Chao . . . Chao-yu-Chuang-Shou-

kung-Ch'in-hsien"—a pause—"Ch'ang-hsi-Huang-Tai-hou."

He finished with a triumphant smile, while I, in abject humility, marveled at his ability to remember the title after drinking so many whisky-sodas.

"A very great woman," he repeated. "The story must be about her mainly—about her life—and it must be called 'Imperial Yellow.' I should like to write it, but I . . . I am not a scholar; indeed, no, I would not be capable. But you; you must do it; you, my friend. . . . The story of Yehonala . . . of her son by Jung Lu or An Ti-hai or Li Lien-ying . . . and of her grandson. . . . Three generations . . . a royal romance."

He took another drink. The misty look had vanished from his eyes, and he was smiling in his cordial yet reserved manner.

"I must tell you how she came to the Forbidden City," he continued. "It will explain one of the customs of the Manchu dynasty. When the Emperor Tao-kung died—ascended the Dragon, we say—Hsien-Feng succeeded him as the Son of Heaven and the Lord of Ten Thousand Years. When the period of mourning for the old emperor was over—twenty-seven months

is the proper time—a decree was issued commanding all beautiful and aristocratic Manchu girls to appear at the palace for selection for the imperial harem. . . . Yehonala was chosen as a concubine and became *Kuei Jen,* meaning Honorable Person. She was clever, oh, clever; and from the very start, it is said, she knew that she would become a great woman. She worked herself into the good graces of the late Emperor Tao-Kung's widow, who was nominally the head of the house; and that influence, particularly after the birth of the heir apparent, cemented her power. She practically ruled the empire when she was twenty-two years old; for the emperor was weak and dissolute, and the empress consort took no interest in politics. . . .

"A house-law of the dynasty forbade the administration of government by a female—but what was that to Yehonala? She always found some subterfuge that assuaged public opinion. She was supreme—supreme until the end. She conquered all. Her own son, the Emperor Tung-chih, she destroyed by encouraging him to lead a vicious life; and she caused his wife, A-lu-te, to commit suicide directly after giving birth to an heir. Nor did she let the child rule,

but appointed the son of one of the Manchu princes. This boy became emperor, but in title only, for the Old Buddha, who dominated him from the very first, never permitted him to have a great amount of power. Once he tried to overthrow her; and the result . . . he was imprisoned on an island in the palace grounds, and there he died—of poison—within twenty-four hours of the Old Buddha's death. . . . Oh, a terrible woman, my friend; a magnificent woman!"

Again the rheumy expression clouded his eyes. The bottle of whisky was half empty. . . .

"It will make a very splendid story," he went on, "beginning with her life and ending with mine. I shall give you the details. But the most interesting part will be the first; telling of the Old Buddha's life in the Forbidden City . . . in the Summer Palace. Let Jung Lu, the officer of the Imperial Guard, be the hero; say that he was my grandfather. I have heard that he was a very handsome and scholarly person; and I do not like the thought of being the descendant of a sham eunuch. No, it must be Jung Lu in the story. . . . Let them sail on the Lotus Lake on moonlight nights; or walk up Peony Hill; or meet on the Jade Girdle Bridge. . . . They are

such pleasant names . . . the Jade Girdle Bridge . . . the Spreading Cloud Pavilion . . . the Pavilion of Purple Light. . . ."

Once more I thought I saw him sway His chin was in his hands, and he looked ahead without seeing me. Hastily I prompted him; I asked how the story would continue, how it would end. He gazed at me blankly for a moment, then smiled, that kingly, reserved smile.

"Oh, the end"—and I was positive that he swayed then—"yes, the end. . . . But perhaps I could tell you the end more clearly in the morning," he said politely, apologetically. "I am somewhat fatigued. You will pardon me if I suggest that we retire?"

He rose with exaggerated dignity and managed to reach one of the divans. I believe he fell asleep instantly.

5

And that is the end.

Two days later I sailed for Manila. Chang was at the dock, as charmingly dignified and regal as ever. I had hoped that he might appear in native dress, the plum-colored robe of my fancy; but he wore faultless gray tweeds and the crease in his trousers stood out like a saber's

edge. He had not once referred to his indiscretions at Macao (certainly I had not), nor did he speak of them at the last moment, as I expected he would. His only remark was:

"You must be sure to send me a copy of your book."

And I shall. . . .

EPISODE THE ELEVENTH

THE CITY OF SOMBER FACES:

CANTONESE FRAGMENTS

1

I LEFT Kowloon on a slate-colored day in March. A fine diamond-drizzle sprinkled the decks of the *Kinshan;* the wind, packed with the dregs of frost, twisted the air and whipped the tarpaulins covering the hatches. Behind, as we throbbed out into the harbor, the mountains of Victoria Island looked like a line of great gray camels in the mist.

Guards patrolled the decks, lithe yellow chaps in soiled uniforms. As on the steamship to Macao, iron bars laced the companionways communicating with the engine-room. . . . The river-pirates, volunteered an optimistic Eurasian at my side, had been particularly bold of late. Had I heard what happened to the Macao boat recently? Yes? Well, that was only one among many similar depredations. Pirates were thick as lice along the Pearl River; many nested in the

old forts that pierced the deserted shores like rotten honeycombs. Elusive, impudent vermin, these river buccaneers. They rarely were caught because most of the native officials and police were pirates themselves. But now and then, for the sake of appearances, a band was brought to justice. Some were tortured with the rope before execution; others were placed in a tall wooden frame that just permitted their toes to touch the ground, and they hung there until they turned purple; but the majority were beheaded immediately. There was a place in Canton where such executions could be seen, he informed me. And, really, they were quite a sight. A rope was twisted around the condemned man's neck, and he was jerked forward into a kneeling position; then, *quish!* went the blade, and his head slobbered across the ground in a welter of blood. . . .

The river trip was invested with a mild uncertainty as a consequence of the Eurasian's talk. But I saw no pirates; only barren, hilly shores; at times patterned with passing junks or other queer Chinese craft; a few desolate forts; scattered villages; and, as we neared Canton, two slender-spired pagodas that seemed to pin up the low clouds.

Some cities, like unpleasant events, cast a warning before them. One approaches them with foreboding, aware that they are woven into his destiny with a dark and dreadful thread. . . . As we pressed closer to Canton I felt the luxuriousness inspired by Hong-Kong giving away to a melancholy profound as the rain-packed sky overhead. I knew, intuitively, that the Canton of my boyhood fancies—a place of royal purple, of the grandeur of gold lacquer screens and dragon tapestries—was about to betray me to a reality.

This premonition was verified as the houses multiplied, and suddenly, too suddenly, we were gliding past ugly, ramshackle dwellings and godowns; grass-thatched house-boats, sampans, junks, and lighters, and millions of roofs that were flung in uneven terraces against the sky. The piles of houses, the swarming river and docks, instantly gave me a sense of tremendous and baffling energy. Canton was at once, and always will be, too stupendous and too indefinite to be sheathed in words.

From the wharf—a roofed landing-stage thronging with curious yellow mortals—I was rickshawed violently over a bridge and upon Shameen, an island southeast of the old and new

cities, where the Europeans live. There I found myself in another world, a pleasant if somewhat conventional sphere of brick houses, sidewalks, and lush camphor-trees and banians that cast a green dusk.

The quiet of Shameen, after the confusion of the river-front, gave me an opportunity to recover my equilibrium, and by the time I reached the hotel I was in a mood for exploration. A morose-looking individual in a *tai-chek-sam,* as the long coat of the Chinese gentleman is called, took charge of me shortly after my arrival, informing me that one could not go through the native city without a guide. I demanded to know the reason, for I detested the idea of being conducted. Well, he replied, the sedan-chair coolies did not speak English, and one could easily become lost in the maze of narrow streets. Indeed, yes! One might be robbed; he might be held for ransom; or he might even be killed! Canton was a city of chaos these days. The Kwang-tung, Dr. Sun's troops, were in control, but there was a report that the rebellious Kwang-si might attack at any moment. So, he concluded, I could see why it was necessary for me to have a guide, and particularly such a thorough guide as himself.

2

We left Shameen by the Yuenhang Gate. There are two gates, each on a bridge, one linking the island with Nam-kwan and the other with Sai-kwan. Every evening at six o'clock these gates were closed, my guide told me as we rocked over a murky canal in sedan-chairs; after that no Chinaman went on to Shameen without a pass and no European entered the native town unescorted.

"Murder and pillage occur every night," he added gloomily. "The soldiers are mercenaries, hired by petty *tuchuns*—military governors, you understand. Kwang-tung or Kwang-si, what difference? It is loot that they want."

With many "Hos" and Hois" from the coolies we were carried down narrow stone steps—and back a thousand years. The native city of Canton, or Kwang-tung as the inhabitants call it, unrolled on either side like a fabulous scroll, the scroll of some ancient artist whose conception was too incredible to be real.

I was carried, careening and swaying, down alleys, past endless rows of shops and dwellings; strange ideographed signs, some painted on cloth

and suspended overhead, others on wood or tin and hanging lengthwise beside open doorways. I was plunged into lanes where the air crawled with the odors of fish and fowl and swine (and who knows what else?); all displayed and at the mercy of flies and other insects. I crossed viscid canals and wide gutters blue with scum. . . . The intricacy of the streets was amazing, bewildering: hundreds and hundreds of narrow streets, millions of narrow streets; streets that twisted and curled, streets that ran straight and seemed to go on interminably; some boarded, some stone-flagged or paved, and others of uncovered dirt.

Canton, in retrospect, appears uncertain, illusory, a place seen through a cobweb. Behind this gauzy filament are faces, a multitude of yellow faces, all somber, with the suffering of ages expressed in melancholy eyes and sharp, almost cruel features; swarms of faces that multiply until, in my confused imagination, they seem heaped together like piles of rusty coins. Now and then the cobweb is torn and I have a clear glimpse. A beggar, maimed and whining; a leper, his feet bound with cloth; an ancient wall, relic of the Ming

dynasty; a shop where silks flash furtively from dark shelves, and large peacock fans make suns of color in the dusk. . . .

But for these shops Canton would be a duotone in gray and black. One comes upon them suddenly, buried in some impossible lane or facing a street foul with refuse. Great metal bars, set crosswise in a wooden frame, protect them from thieves. Within, displayed by importuning merchants, are foamy laces, and linens that have a sheer, poignant fragrance; ivory and precious stones; kingfisher work and sandalwood, and magnificent Spanish-Chinese shawls—heavy silk squares, weighted with fringe and embroidery and flaming with color. I recall one in particular, a shawl purple as passion and embroidered in deep magenta. Had I bought it, as I was tempted to do, I know that, in America, it would have become a thing of brutal vividness, as ghastly as an exotic woman transplanted from her native luxury into a setting wholly commonplace. But there in Canton it was a brilliant gesture, a reflex of color from that period when Ming and Spaniard moved against a background opulent and barbaric.

On that first venture into the native city I went through a bewildering number of temples, not

that I wished to visit so many in one afternoon (or at all, for that matter), but my guide considered it the thing to do. My protests did not so much as ripple his Confucian calm. Very solemnly, and with inherent dignity, he conducted me from temple to temple. The Kwang Hau Temple, the Temple of Longevity, the Flowery Forest Monastery, the Chun-ka-chie. . . . Sepulchers all, haunted by ghosts of grandeur. The once marvelous carvings, now covered with dust and spider-webs, were crumbling to decay; the gold-leaf was tarnished and peeling. The very images, peering out from bat-guano and moldy altar-ornaments, were eloquent of decadence.

Troops were quartered in some. The cloisters were being used as stables; the courtyards were buried in filth and dung. My guide said that the soldiers belonged to Dr. Sun's army. Young fellows they were, some less than sixteen, with a wistful hungering in their eyes. They wore drab gray uniforms, a color so depressing, in that cheerless setting, that even the red bands on their caps could not lighten the effect. Boy-soldiers, playing at war; attracted by the smell of gunpowder or inflamed by promises of plunder. . . . One cannot soon forget the aching desolation of

those Cantonese temples, their courts packed with mulsh and offal, and peopled with slim boys waiting to die. . . .

As a final touch of gloom my guide took me to the City of the Dead, a series of buildings where, in the midst of white funeral banners and scarlet trappings, bodies were reposing to await a propitious day for burial. A place of flawless silence: candles on the altar, a musk-like odor enriching the air. I wandered among alcoves containing coffins of ebony and sandalwood, followed by a solemn attendant who explained in detail the history of each corpse. There were three grades of service tendered the bodies, he said, the highest costing twenty dollars, the next ten dollars, and the lowest eight dollars. . . . A distressing experience, this City of the Dead, not because of its purpose, but because of its significance. To me, it expressed with tragic eloquence the Chinese character—a mixture of superstition, obedience to custom, and infinite patience.

On the way back to the hotel a queer incident occurred. We were in a street so narrow that the people had to flatten themselves against the walls to let my sedan-chair pass. I happened to glance toward a doorway on my left just as a

man appeared from the gloom within. He wore a long black Chinese coat and a skullcap. Indeed, he was dressed so inconspicuously that I might not have observed him beyond that one glance had not he paused at sight of me and stepped back. Then, with a suddenness that drove home like a physical shock, I saw that his eyes were blue, his skin white, and his features anything but Oriental. . . . He vanished, lost in the dusk within, and I went rocking along the narrow, smelly street, aware that, for a moment, Romance had touched me.

Why was he, a white man in Chinese costume, there in the native city? I wondered; and I shall wonder always. A police officer? Too melodramatic. A criminal? Probable enough. A beach-comber, some wretched soul who simply wished to lose himself? If so, I know of no place where he could do it with such ease. But, whatever he may have been, he was, to me Romance; and he gave Canton an added sense of tremendous and mysterious activity.

3

After dinner my guide appeared with suggestions for the disposal of the evening. I could

go to a restaurant in the old city and enjoy Chinese food and Chinese wine while a singsong girl entertained me by making falsetto sounds and clapping two wooden blocks in my ear. Or, if I preferred, I could visit the Flower Boats.

The Flower Boats? I inquired.

Yes, where the prostitutes lived. . . .

I dare say I looked mildly annoyed, for immediately he assured me that all the white gentlemen visited the Flower Boats if only for a "look-see." . . .

And so we took a sampan on the river. About us the darkness was ash-purple and sequined with lights. A warm stench rose from the water, heavy with the smell of sour mud and swill. Other sampans were gliding and scraping over mud-shallows: throaty ejaculations, fragments of song, came from the boatmen, and the muffled clash of cymbals sounded in some house on the bank. There was a certain beat and rhythm in the night, a heavy, measured throbbing, like that of a heart old and afflicted.

I remarked upon the unceasing activity, and my guide told me that more than a million creatures—I cannot call them human beings—live on the canals and the Chu-kiang. They have strange customs, these river-dwellers, or *ta-min*

as they are called, some of which I learned as we stole out silently toward the Flower Boats. They are social outcasts, and from among them come the *tan-ki-mui,* or singing-girls. In their rules governing women there is the usual Eastern injustice: a wife is not allowed to leave the boat; there, in that small space, she eats, sleeps, works, and dies. But custom is more lenient with the man: he may have as many concubines as he can support; this luxury, however, may not be indulged until after he has acquired a legitimate wife called the *kit-fat,* or Number One Wife. . . .

"The Flower Boats," explained my guide, "aside from their ornate decorations, are distinguished from other house-boats by the letter 'D.'" And he added with subtle innuendo: "They are licensed, and the *loquiia* under medical observance."

We approached a copperish burst of light, and, after silent manœuvering, scraped a platform. I could see by the glow reflected from within that the front of the main structure was elaborately carved and gilded.

A fat, oily Chinaman met me on the deck and pushed me between silk curtains. Several little girls, vermilion-lipped and white-faced, greeted

me as I entered. Evidently business was poor, for there were no masculine occupants.

I was conducted to a couch where I sat, quite stupidly I am sure, while those queer little courtezans, gathered in a semicircle about me, giggled, and made remarks that, had I understood them, would have been interesting if not elevating. The proprietor urged me to take my choice; the guide hovered in the doorway, registering disapproval of my conservatism.

I found something sharply pathetic about those tiny girls in brocaded jackets and satin trousers. I did n't pity them because of their profession, for I realized that they knew nothing better, nor was my reaction a sudden altruistic interest in their souls. I was thinking of their bodies; of the atmosphere in which they lived, the foul river air that fed their lungs, the lack of proper food and normal pleasure; the raw, drenching winters. . . . The very fact of their existence seemed incredibly ironic and cruel. They were superfluous lives, the result of some profligate creative scheme; a scheme that had overcrowded Canton with millions of apparently purposeless bodies whose very presence, in such a compact mass, was the cause of their extermination.

The proprietor looked disappointed when he

learned that I was merely an observer. However, he succeeded in forcing some vitriolic rice-wine upon me, and had one of the *loquiia* sing, in return for which he received one Canton dollar and several coins to be distributed among the courtezans. When I moved to depart, one little creature became quite excited, shrieking and clinging to my coat.

"She wishes to be kissed," my guide explained solemnly.

. . . The emotional one followed us outside, and as we drifted away, she made a tiny silhouette against the silken curtains of the Flower Boat; to me, a gauze-winged creature caught and fluttering in a huge paper lantern.

"Tue-nai-amah!" she squealed, persistent to the last.

Which, my guide informed me voluntarily, had something to do with my grandmother and was decidedly unflattering.

4

The name "Canton" invariably brings to my mind an incident pressed indelibly into the sheaves of boyhood memories. A cold, misty November dusk: the blue darkness sifting down

outside, the pallid moon-fire of frost on the lawn; and, within, the humming fire and a man with a widow's peak who sat buried in an immense velour chair, talking of China. I was seven or eight at the time, and my knowledge of China was vague, colored chiefly by dragons and a jade ring that my mother wore. But the country had a subtle fascination for me, and, dimly, I sensed that it was woven into my youth and manhood. And so I listened, hypnotized, as the man with the widow's peak told of his experiences in the far Flowery Kingdom. He talked mostly of a certain Doctor of Canton, one Sun Yat Sen, whose life was a succession of adventures and intrigues; of his plots against the Manchu throne, and his breathless escapes and flights. . . . Immediately, and inevitably, the Doctor of Canton became, to me, the supreme expression of Adventure, a figure surrounded by dragons and jade rings. During the following years he lived magnificently in my imagination. Even after I was considerably older, he haunted my fancy. . . .

Before I went to Canton I knew that the Doctor—now much more than a physician—lived there; and I determined to see him and talk with him. To this end, I obtained a letter

of introduction in Hong-Kong to a certain Chinese gentleman in Canton who was (and, I trust, still is) a close friend of Sun Yat Sen. Accordingly, one afternoon a day or so after my arrival, I set out in a sedan-chair for this gentleman's residence. It was some distance from Shameen, near the outskirts of the city, and when I arrived it was rather late. A fuchsia-red sun dipped behind mauve and sable roofs, leaving an orange stain on the sky. The walled house and surrounding country had that peculiar wild desolation that attends the sunset.

I was admitted into a garden unexpectedly charming and quaint as one of Pan Chih Yu's poems. A pond lay half smothered in lotus-leaves, and butterfly-trees, their pink blossoms lithely astir, seemed to drench the dusk in pallid rain. By the water was a pygmy pavilion, eaves tilted impertinently toward the sky. I half expected to come upon some tiny maiden playing a moon-guitar. . . . I found, instead, a frail old lady who vanished quickly, tortuously on "golden-lily" feet; a gray moth put to flight by my intrusion.

I waited, drunk with fancies, while a servant went to summon the master of the house. The air was saturated with silence, and, high over-

head, a wedge of birds was driven into the sky. The sudden peace of the place, the tranquil beauty of the pavilion, the walls and shrubs, all melting into the twilight, seemed to wound my imagination with a sense of poignant loveliness. I could see the garden in the past, with my maiden of the moon-guitar in the pavilion, and at her feet camphor-wood chests and silks, ivory and peacock feathers, brought by some lover from far Tartary or Tibet. . . .

And then a figure came through the dusk. My host looked important enough to wear the red button and peacock-feather of a high court official. Dark robes and a dark skullcap; a face that, in the half-light, seemed molded in porcelain.

He held my letter of introduction close to his eyes. . . .

Would I honor him by coming inside?

Why not sit in the garden, I suggested, in the pavilion?

He seemed pleased that I liked his garden, and sent a servant to brew tea.

We sat there by the green-black pool which, in the gloaming, became a glimmering incense-bowl that offered up sweet smoke to the dusk.

When polite formalities had been observed, I

announced the purpose of my visit. I had been informed that he knew the Doctor of Canton well, I said, and I wondered if it would be possible for him to arrange a meeting.

He beamed. To serve me would be an honor.

But the Doctor was a busy man. . . .

Oh, but he was always delighted to receive foreign visitors, particularly Americans. Of course, there was some slight trouble at present. . . . Kwang-tung and Kwang-si. . . . But an interview could be arranged.

I told him then of the man with the widow's peak and of my boyhood fancies.

He continued to beam. He spoke liquid syllables. . . . A great man, Sun Wen (Sun Yat Sen's official name). A noble man, and a true patriot. He was born between Canton and Macao; did I know that? Humble parents, but very honorable. Sun's father was a Christian convert, and he saw to it that his son had the proper education. Sun was twenty when he entered the college of medicine at Macao. A brilliant student who became a brilliant surgeon. But it was China's political troubles that challenged his genius. He threw his whole life into the cause of the people and determined to effect the overthrow of the Manchus. . . .

The servant came with tea: fragrant Kee-choung. . . .

Sun traveled the length and breadth of China, often in disguise, risking torture and death, to preach his doctrine. (Thus my host between sips of tea.) He demanded justice for the people, a free press, the proper educational facilities, and relief from the long oppression of the mandarins. . . . He was a member of a secret organization in Canton of which there were eighteen members—and eventually seventeen were caught and beheaded. Sun always escaped. It was his personality. He drew men and dominated them. Persecuted, and with a price upon his head, he continued to stir the multitudes. Once in Swatow there was a rebellion. Sun and his followers persuaded the revolutionists to join forces with them in an attempt to capture Canton. When the time came, the Swatow troops were prevented from lending their aid through the treachery of one of their members, who informed the authorities of the planned uprising. Sun's small army was waiting at Hong-Kong to sail up the river to Canton. A telegram was despatched from Swatow apprising the commanding officer of conditions there; but he misread the message, and the troops were sent to Canton—

only to be captured in a body. The leaders, Sun among them, destroyed all papers in their headquarters in Canton and fled. Sun managed to work his way to Macao, where he was hidden by friends. But Macao became too dangerous for him. He went to Hong-Kong . . . Kobe . . . Honolulu . . . San Francisco . . . London. The hand of the Manchus reached far. There, in British territory, Sun was kidnapped and held prisoner in the Chinese legation for twelve days. The British Government, learning of his plight, forced his release. . . .

But that was only one of his many exploits. During his travels in foreign lands he obtained great amounts of money from native sons of Han living abroad, and he bought arms and ammunition which were smuggled into China. . . . The great day came: a Manchu edict declared the Celestial Empire a republic. Sun, in London at the time, was asked to be President. But he was a modest man (he who had brought about the downfall of the Manchus), and he declined, stating that Yuan Shi-k'ai would be a more capable executive than he.

Thus, briefly, the story of the Doctor of Canton.

Darkness had thickened, and the garden was

mottled with shadows of violet and gray. Pearls were in the incense-bowl: a few reflected stars caught in the still black water. My host was lithely rubbing his hands; night had lined the air with a raw chill.

I rose. He would go inside and write a note to Sun Wen, he announced. Would not I come in, too? The night air . . .

Afterward he accompanied me to the gate. As I turned for a last look at the garden, I saw a shadowy form by the pool. Perhaps it was a maid with sloe-dark eyes, playing a moon-guitar.

5

I awoke to the somber opulence of another day—I say somber for even the hazed sun which had slipped through the clouds could not destroy the melancholy of Canton—and, after breakfast, despatched the letter to Sun Yat Sen.

I shall be delighted to see you this afternoon—

And so I went to meet the Doctor of Canton. . . . A sampan, curtained and painted red, took me across the river, past a scarred Chinese warship anchored in midstream and to the wharf of

the headquarters of South China. A guard of gray-clad soldiers were waiting, their uniforms extraordinarily clean. Pale sunshine ran a tongue of light along their bayonets. With the rattle of accoutrements, the clack of heels on stone, I was escorted past more guards, through a yellowed courtyard and into the cellar-like gloom of a hall. Stairs ascended into a rectangle of light, and up we went. At the top my credentials were examined for the second time, the guard dismissed, and I followed a smiling secretary into a room that, obviously, was the meeting-place of the cabinet. A long table, green-topped, and rows of chairs; bare floor and bare walls. The secretary disappeared; I was alone.

As I waited, wrapped about with silence, I felt a thrilling intimacy with intrigue. It was a setting of melodrama: the long cabinet-room, the leaden sky heavy with swollen clouds, and the scarred war-ship in midstream awaiting any emergency.

Suddenly a man in khaki moved out quietly from behind a screen in the far end. He advanced toward me, smiling, a gleam in his friendly eyes, and I realized that he was the Doctor of Canton.

We shook hands and sat down; I with veins of excitement spraying my spine.

"You have come at an unpleasant time," he began, in a cultured, genial voice.

His enunciation was perfect. But that was not surprising, as he is a college graduate. What did surprise me was that this gracious, mild-mannered Chinese was the romantic figure of my boyhood fancies, the man who had knocked the rotted foundations from under the Manchu dynasty; who had refused the presidency of the young republic, but, later, when his country was threatened with disintegration, had declared himself President of the South in defiance of the corrupt Northern Government.

"The customs affair has upset us considerably," he said, "and upset us mentally more than politically. It showed what South China might expect from the powers—particularly America." He paused; looked grave. "I regret very much the action of your Government in sending warships to Canton."

He referred to the then recent seizure of the customs fund by his party and the swift action of the European and American powers in despatching a fleet of gunboats to Canton.

"We of South China did look to America for

friendship—and recognition," he went on. "The United States, if we could only make her see it, can mold China into a great republic like herself." He nodded; I remember that vividly, for it seemed to italicize his statement. "The Peking powers have not made for a united republic; in fact, under Tsao Kun, they are daily getting further away from it. We of the South have the means of progress if we only had the power. That power is recognition of our Government, which, of course, means credit. With credit we could virtually do the rest alone."

Although physically he was not as I had visualized him, his personality blended with his adventurous history; a sheer, commanding personality. His words were carefully chosen, were placed with the exquisite precision of mosaic-work. As he talked, I was back in the fire-lit room of my boyhood, with the blue dusk sifting down and the hoar-frost on the lawn.

"I have a plan which I call the International Development Scheme," he continued. "Coöperation, not fighting, is my principle. But"—and his eyes took on a fierce gleam—"if necessary I will fight to attain the ultimate peace that means coöperation. International war, commercial war, and class war; those are the three

great conflicts in China. International war, as we know, is simply organized brigandage on a tremendous scale; a terrible thing. When America entered the European War she did so to put an end to all wars. We had great hope, we of China, believing that what we call *Tatung,* or the Age of Great Harmony, was about to begin. But, although successful in war, America failed in peace. The world has been thrown back into chaotic conditions. Greed and lust have gripped Europe again; she needs materials for new wars to come. . . . And China would be a valuable acquisition. China, after hundreds of years of slumber, is waking, realizing that she must obey the mandate of progress. She can organize for peace or for war. With the menace of Europe and Japan over her, how does she dare to think of peace? The militarists of the North wish to Prussianize China; I desire to have her cemented into a republic so powerful in her peace that other nations will be afraid to molest her. To do this we must organize from within. And I am wondering if it can be done with the pen or with the sword."

The sun had gone; rain fell in a fine sifting of gray ash. But the dampness could not chill me. The optimism of the man flowed through

me in subtle warmth. It no longer seemed incongruous that this was he who, failing in his first attempt to overthrow Yehonala, the Manchu woman, had escaped and fled from Canton to Macao, and thence by devious ways to America and England, enlisting sympathy and aid as he traveled, until, his support strengthened morally and materially, he had returned to make actual his dream of a republic. I was, suddenly, hopeful in the face of towering difficulties. I could see China, the mighty dragon, crawling from her bed of ancient corruption, to a place in the sun.

"It might be done with the pen," he resumed, "if the powers would keep out. But, as we have seen, they will not. Very well. China is waking, I said. If the powers will not relinquish their grasp peacefully, China will see what the pressure of her millions of population, organized into a great army, can do to persuade them."

Again his eyes flashed. Behind him, through an open window, I could see the war-ship anchored in midstream; a reminder that at any moment he might be forced to seek the protection of its gray gun-turrets. . . . And yet he dared to dream of a militant China carrying his ideals into actual physical struggle with the world!

"I spoke of a plan for international development," he said. "A phase of this scheme is to make possible a greater usage of our national resources. Regulate the Yang-tse, improve the railway systems, construct ports, and improve our clothing and food industries. These things must be done. For instance, I have plans for the development of Canton into a world port. With the establishment of shipyards, a good railway, proper docking facilities, and an improvement of its waterway, it will be, not only the largest city in China, but the greatest port. Its advance as a commercial center will not injure Hong-Kong as a free port; it will simply make competition keener. And competition is the main structure of development. Of course, you say this will take years. Perhaps. Canton, I admit, is in a state of chaos. But it is a revolutionary city. When fighting ceases, it will become normal. At present we have no finances. We have nothing more tangible than dreams. . . ."

Sun Yat Sen closed his narrow eyes thoughtfully. Except for the soft rain and the creaking of floors in the hall where gray-capped guards moved, there was an uncanny stillness. Suddenly the little man looked up.

"One common language and one common coin," he announced. "They alone can bring about the national unity that is so vital to the preservation of China."

"But is n't that impossible?" I suggested. "At least, in this generation?"

"Impossible? Yes—as long as the powers hold China a slave to their interests. If the money of Hong-Kong and Canton were the same, the international banks would lose a valuable percentage of exchange. And if the people of the various provinces spoke the same tongue there would be less cause for internal strife—which would be fatal to foreign interests."

He talked on, the footsteps of the sentries punctuating his remarks. I do not remember all that he said; his personality submerged words. But I can recall that I felt as though a soft filament was being woven before my eyes, a cobweb of dreams. Splendid dreams, and so fragile that they seemed incapable of holding the monster China in their gossamer bonds.

When I left, the rain was falling harder. It flung a chilling dampness upon the ardor that Sun had aroused. "Nothing more tangible than dreams . . ." On the far shore, a column of troops were marching away from their barracks,

many of them, I fancied, somber-faced boys, like those in the dung-littered temples. They brought to mind the profligate mass of decadent life that crawled and swarmed through the intricate streets and on the canals; the City of the Dead; the Flower Boats; the temples with their tarnished gold-leaf and rotting splendors. "Nothing more tangible than dreams . . ." Dreams! Dreams stirring like ghosts among ruins . . . dreams. . . .

And, suddenly, it seemed that I was in a vast City of the Dead, and that China, old China, was a corpse awaiting a propitious day for burial.

EPISODE THE TWELFTH

ZAMBOANGA

1

ZAMBOANGA. A savage, lyrical beauty in the name. The first time I saw it on the map, printed in italics across the end of Mindanao and the Sulu Sea, it gave me an exquisite thrill. Immediately, regardless of distance or place, it seemed associated with Zanzibar and Mombasa, those ports of black men and ivory and spices. Here, I said to myself, is a town where high adventure waits; and I shall go there one day while I am still young.

2

Night on the South China Sea. Translucent darkness about the ship, and in her wake a path of phosphorus churned to fire by the propeller. Mattresses and cots littered the decks; unabashed figures in night-dress stood by the rail or lay gasping on drenched sheets. . . . Across the sliding black undulations, not many hundred

miles distant, the equator lay like a friendly bond between Hades and the Malay Archipelago.

"My God!" panted the Man from Hong-Kong, seated on the edge of his cot.

A faint echo came from the Scribbler, lounging on another cot close by.

Moist heat burdened the air and pressed against the skin like heated gelatin. The faint wind fanned into being by the motion of the vessel only thickened the sultry closeness.

"You won't like Manila," predicted the Man from Hong-Kong, disagreeably.

"I don't intend to stay there long," said the Scribbler.

"Well, you won't like it for even a little while," was the other's opinion. "I suppose you're going down to Java with the ship. Mmm . . . You 'll die of heat there."

"I 'm going to Zamboanga," announced the Scribbler. "That is, if I can get a boat within a reasonable time."

"What!" the Man from Hong-Kong almost screamed. "Zamboanga!" He groaned. "Terrible place. Ghastly. Awful."

"But . . ."

"My dear young man, take my advice: don't go to Zamboanga."

"But . . ."

"It 's a God-forsaken place, set down on the edge of nowhere. Has n't even the society that Manila has—and that 's little enough. Zamboanga! Great heavens! I spent two months there a year ago, and my liver has n't got back to normal yet."

That was quite evident to the Scribbler.

"Well, I intend to go there anyhow," he declared defiantly. "I've always wanted to see it. The very fact of being in a town with a barbaric name like that will make up for any lack of society or comfort."

"Hump!" grunted the Man from Hong-Kong; which is the way a seasoned dweller in the tropics or any part of Asia expresses his contempt for all energetic upstarts who come out filled with romantic twaddle.

3

Morning, and the ship moving in a profound depression. The great blazing globe of sky and sea held the heat like an electric bulb, and white-hot sparks darted over the corrugated water.

Luzón hung in the offing. The Scribbler, leaning on the rail, gazed through the blistering glare at the coast of Zimbales Province and was not stirred. It was too hot to be stirred. . . . Mountainous islands slipped by and seemed to melt in the incandescent heat. Cavite Bay lay ahead, a monotony of dazzling cobalt; and, beyond it, a palpitating line, Manila. The Manila of Dewey, of José Rizal. But the Scribbler could associate it only with hemp and cigars.

The ship's crews ceased to rumble some distance from the docks, and the great vessel drifted languidly in hazed sunlight while the health officials came aboard. At their heels was a young Filipino who distributed cards bearing the inscription: *"Santa Ana Cabaret—the Largest in the World."* . . . It seemed a period interminable before the boat moved up to the wharf, and the Scribbler, still leaning on the rail, felt his spirit flag and wither in the purgatorial calm. He wondered, vaguely, if the approach to Zamboanga would be like this. . . .

At length the gang-plank was lowered. Under a shed packed with heat was a sweating multitude: brown islanders, ivory-skinned people with Spanish features, and many whites

standing apart in lofty segregation. The Filipino women, with their puffy sleeves of pineapple fiber, their gauzy fichus and trailing skirts, fluttered about like tropical hummingbirds; and the Scribbler found it mildly irritating that human beings should possess such energy in this crippling climate.

Behind the dock were many *calesas,* the ridiculous pony-carts peculiar to Manila, and he climbed into one and went swaying off in the savage glare.

Roads where the dust swirled up in golden clouds; an expanse of green that dropped into dry moats; gray walls pierced with loopholes and a grim gateway; and then the hotel, a rectangular pile rising from tropical gardens.

At the desk the Scribbler made inquiry about the boats to Zamboanga.

There would be one in five days.

4

Tiffin, or lunch, in a cool, drowsy café; and then out into the burning heat for a ride on the Pasig River. At such a time, with the sun glowering directly overhead, a siesta seemed the only normal impulse to the Scribbler, but

acquaintances from the ship, who were leaving the following day and were determined to see the city, had insisted that he accompany them.

Pasig . . . a tawny vein through the heart of Manila. A typical Malaysian river, brown with swarming native life, with the rust of foreign vessels, and sluggish with fever and pestilence; spanned by a few bridges that bore an air of futility as they hung above a river so obviously Eastern in spite of the dreams and sweat of white men; edged with marsh-grass and palms, with spindly wharves, with match-box houses, with a conglomerate tumble of walls and roofs, and obscene factories; all sweltering in the drench of equatorial sunlight. . . . Thus it appeared to the Scribbler, who felt as though he had become a part of the scene, congealed into it with the moist heat. Some distance beyond the city he found relief from the monotony of mud-brown and sunburnt green in a riverside garden that saturated his vision with tropical color; a cool green inclosure, its walls veined with creepers and climbing orchids, its shadows aflame with crimson hibiscus. His fancy nurtured this succulent morsel; transplanted it to a more appropriate setting, to the Zamboanga of his imagination, and there peopled it with

characters to amuse himself during the dull boat-ride.

Literally, it is but a short walk across a dusty green from the Pasig to Intramuros, the old walled Spanish city; but, figuratively, it is from the Philippine Archipelago to Andalusia. After the river trip, the Scribbler and his companions walked back to the hotel through the fortified town.

Most of the houses were low and of stone, and iron-barred windows gave an air of secretiveness that the bare, frank walls denied; whitewashed walls that stared in the late afternoon sunshine. From an arched doorway, borne on cool shadow, came the aromatic scents of wines and other liquors; from another, a whiff of garlic and food smells. In shops drowsy with gloom were native wares—straw hats and Philippine embroidery and bolts of cobwebby pineapple cloth. Open gates disclosed hot gardens with listless palms. Some of these gates were carved; all were blanched with decrepitude. Balconies sagged over the narrow streets. . . . The architecture was Spain undiluted. But the people were not so pure. A yellow stream trickled through the red heart of Intramuros; slim half-castes, or mestizos, in white ducks, looking

dignified in spite of their small stature; ivory-bronze women with an air of fugitive beauty, expressed in frail features and gauze-winged dresses. The *calesas* and *carromatas* that rocked through the dust were driven by knotty, brown men, and natives steered the few automobiles that rattled between the bleached houses. . . . Manila is Spain tinged with ocher, just as Cuba is Spain tinged with ink. A Latin temperament submerged in Malayan fatalism; and, running through this complex nature, a streak undeniably Chinese. . . . However, the Scribbler remarked that in Intramuros, if not in Manila proper, Spain predominated. Its bister pigment colored the swarthy, mustached men, the slovenly, voluptuous women who lounged in the doorways, the sunburnt children, and the sensitive-lipped girls hovering beyond iron grilles or enjoying *sorbetos* in languid shade. These girls particularly had a delicate litheness that told of a liaison between Andalusia and Malaysia. And their transparent golden skin, their flower-like grace—promises of a tragically swift blooming—were indisputable proofs of the dominance of Spanish blood.

Even the streets—narrow, tortuous streets—

had a dramatic flavor essentially Latin. They were old Spain—the Spain of Philip and Magellan and Legazpe—a Spain undisturbed and impervious, tyrannical even in decay; and they suggested to the Scribbler, not a series of cold, naked historical facts, but a mood. They belonged to a phase of the past, historical only in the sense that it was part of dead years—a brutal period of smoke and sword, of rape and conquest, all perpetrated in the name of the Cross. The symbol of the Divine Agony was the symbol of persecution; and the shadow of Spanish Christianity darkened the Philippines with a threat as terrifying as the anger of pagan gods. It was the same shadow, the same proud insolence and intolerance, that had menaced Mexico and Peru, Cuba and Florida, and certain islands of the West Indies. This shadow, in its essence, presented a picture of prodigal savagery, a background upon which a drama of tragedy might be imposed in primitive hues. The Scribbler could see his characters: a conquistador, nailed and plumed, brutal and swart as a Moor; an island girl, sullen, passionate, and fair with the tawny loveliness of Malay maidens. These two moved in the pale light of altar

candles, in the blood-glare of inquisitorial fires; about them rang the clangor of steel, dying at intervals to permit an ironic interval of prayer; and shifting in the background were cowled Dominicans and Spanish mercenaries armored and helmeted. . . . Sumptuous pageantry hiding the naked lust of conquest. . . . Yet, queerly, this fantasy—or phantasmagoria—inspired by Intramuros did not merge with the past of Manila. It belonged to Zamboanga, and more to the word than to the town; a name that seemed part Spanish and part Malay, and invested with the stark barbarity of both.

"I must go there," thought the Scribbler, stirred by his own dreams. "I must. It holds the seed of a story. It will not disillusion me. And what if it does? Can disillusion smother the fire of creative energy?"

In fancy, he saw a blue tropical bay, fringed with cocoa-palms and dazzling beaches; and, beyond, a white, staring town, steeped in the glamour of a prodigious and imaginary past.

And, as if to encourage the illusion, the bells of a church somewhere in the old walled town set the air to trembling with brassy throbs and pounded the sunset sky into burning response.

5

That night the Scribbler determined to book passage for Zamboanga the next day. There was about the decision a finality that seemed to release him from the uncertainty of the past twenty-four hours. His berth was paid to Java, and beyond. But what were dollars when romance was involved?

With dusk the sultry heat dissolved. Manila cooled itself in transparent darkness, and, out over the harbor, the Southern Cross leaned down. To the Scribbler, watching from the hotel, it was a throbbing call to adventure. . . . *Santa Ana Cabaret, the largest in the World.* . . .

Bareheaded and with a flower in his lapel—both of which seemed consistent with the excursion and the silky tropical night—he set out in a *calesa,* leaving the lights of the Luneta for the dusky uncertainty of another quarter. The sky was drenched in a silver rain of stars, and a heavy sweetness filled the air, like wine in a blue crystal cup. Was it the fragrant *ylang-ylang,* the Scribbler wondered, or *dama de noche,* a flower that distils its intoxicating perfume after dark? Whatever it was, it seemed the essence

of the night; a drunken, delirious night, designed for escapade.

The Santa Ana Cabaret announced itself with a sheaf of lights—eyes that winked an invitation. They seemed to assure fulfilment of the night's promise. . . . The advertising card exaggerated very little, if at all, when it announced that the Santa Ana was the largest cabaret in the world; certainly the Scribbler had never seen a place so vast. The great brown hall, swimming in a watery glow diffused by electric lights on the high ceiling, seemed to dwindle into far sienna corners, with the illusion of endless and bewildering immensity. The tremendousness of the room reduced the people to Lilliputian size. A band was playing in a raised pavilion in the center of the floor, and the music seemed diluted, a weak fluid sound that was lost in the preposterous spaciousness.

The Scribbler was led to one of the many tables that lined the dance-floor. Near-by was a party of tourists; beyond them, at another table, a swarthy youth with gray half-moons beneath his eyes, and a woman whose hair was the yellow of Egyptian gold under the searching electric lights. The inevitable sailor was present, a blond blue-jacket who sat laughing with

a Filipino girl on the other side of the hall. He gave an added flavor of adventure to the place, with his frank, wind-leathered face and his manner of splendid carelessness. Scattered about the hall, seated singly and in groups, were Filipino ballerinas, some with the ivory skin of Spain, others with the pale yellow of mixed blood, and still others dark with Malayan bronze. All wore the national costume, the trailing skirt, fichu, and stiff, full sleeves of *pina,* or pine-apple cloth; dyed with pink and red and yellow and brown—hues that seemed absorbed in the pervading sienna of the immense room. A *peso* was the price of a dance with one of these ballerinas.

. . . A fruity concoction of transparent amber was brought. The feel of the frosty glass, the chilling coolness of the drink, introduced a silken languor into the mood of the Santa Ana. A waltz rhythm was throbbing out from the band pavilion; something familiar and sharply sweet. The Scribbler let his gaze quest over the ballerinas. . . . This nose was too flat or that mouth too full. It was not that he sought perfection, but a type suited to the atmosphere. He could see her in his imagination, this type—pale as old ivory, with the predominance

of Spain verified by a thin, narrow nose, a delicately oval face, and hands finely wrought. Her eyes would be Oriental, not oblique in shape but with a curious twist of expression, and dark with the slumbering sullenness of a tropical night. There would be a touch of the savage behind her look, like a dagger meshed in silk. This type was the supreme expression of Spain-in-Asia—the exotic, superb jade who belonged to the story that Intramuros had left smoldering in his imagination. . . And, quite suddenly, he found her.

She swung by in the arms of a white-clad man whose personality was burned to cold ineffectualness by the very fact of her presence. Her body moved with the rhythm of Spain, a melting litheness that was Andalusia embodied in a thin shaft of a girl. But her eyes were Asia . . . dark with the appalling splendor of a tropical night. Her dress of frail pineapple cloth seemed to have absorbed the fire of herself, a shade of dark rose-madder, rich as the dregs of claret. It was a culminating esthetic touch, that dress; and its gossamer texture, incongruous with the depth and wickedness of its dye, seemed the proper sheath for her sultry personality.

The Scribbler, exalted by the discovery,

watched her revolutions toward the sienna remoteness of the far end. She was like a diminishing dream, a creature too incredibly superb to be real. Instantly she belonged to Zamboanga (not the actuality, but the city of his imagination), to the period of rape and flame and sword; and he could visualize her standing beside the sheening tropical bay, her splendid body bronze against the sunset. . . .

That girl (to the waiter); who was she?

That one? Estrella de Sala, the star of the hall. Did the señor wish to dance with her? If so. . . .

The Scribbler assumed stony indifference, for it was a matter purely esthetic and seemed soiled by the suggestion of an outsider, particularly a Filipino waiter.

After the waltz he watched the girl (a mestiza or half-caste) return to her seat at a table with several other ballerinas. It seemed the propitious moment for him to make his entrance into her sphere; a sphere so closely allied with fancy that it required a delicate shading of action to prevent disappointment or disillusion. He would not participate in body in this overture; he signaled a young Filipino whose position vaguely seemed that of manager. . . . The

Filipino smiled, and just the proper smile, without suggestiveness or innuendo, and moved off toward the table where the mestiza sat. The Scribbler was aware of glances. Presently the intermediary returned. She had the next dance; but the one after that?

The music started with the mad, crashing cadence of a jazz piece. The Scribbler watched her to see if she would follow the delirious syncopation; but her lithe grace remained unaltered, and she floated across the floor with a sinuous rhythm that made the one-step a thing of fluid motion.

At the beginning of the next dance (a waltz with an Argentine throb) the Scribbler felt a chill of nervous excitement. The very sight of her had filled him with sultry exultation. Now would close contact fan it to fire—or pillage every illusion from his brain? He felt crushingly stupid as he approached her table. This was the sort of thing that seamen and stevedores did. . . . Then she was so close to him that her breath was like a shadow of flame against his cheek, and they were circling over the floor to the undulating Argentine measure.

A cross of pink mother-of-pearl hung below her throat, incongruously chaste against the

clear amber of her skin. At closer range, there was a persistent savagery about her, in her impenetrable eyes, in the lift of her lips; a touch of Africa—not in blood but in spirit. She was the essence of the word "Zamboanga" in all its cruel beauty. She fulfilled every demand of the Scribbler's story. In an effort to explore beneath the surface (a perilous venture!) he spoke a few inconsequentials. Her gaze dropped to the pink mother-of-pearl. From her black hair (not the blue-black of Asia but the glossed ebony of Spain) rose a brutal sweetness. No sound came from her throat. Undefeated, the Scribbler murmured a compliment, some bit of flattery designed to meet her Andalusian ideas of gallantry. Her response was the same silence —a potent silence. He then repeated his polite phrase in Spanish, poor Spanish. . . . The faintest smile (or was it a smile?) quivered her lips. Amusement? Contempt? Derision? This sudden complexity challenged him as words could never have done. Here was fine fire in which to forge his fancy. Was it sullenness or savage dullness? Whereas his perception of the flesh-and-blood creature was cloudy, he could discern the story-woman with a vision sharply clarified to register her values. A sultry wench,

this imaginary character, as involved as she was elemental. Not the type to respond to a young man of few fervid impulses. Her nature demanded a coarse brute, with something of the Moor in him; and their relationship would be complicated by a desire sharp as a Malay creese. . . . The superb indifference or sullenness of the girl in the rose-madder dress (he had decided that it was not dullness; and certainly it could not be timidity) submerged the Scribbler's ego. He felt as ineffectual as water against her heavy defense of silence. Words, or rather *his* words, could never move her. Now, if suddenly he picked her up and carried her out of the hall, or if he bit her in a wild fit of passion, it might be a different matter. But he had no idea of acting a rôle so foreign to his temperament. It is doubtful, indeed, if he desired his relationship with her to take such a hectic turn. Her very remoteness fascinated him. She was a distant flame that touched him only with reflected warmth. But although she was removed from his ken in the sense of differences in character and ideas, she was closely linked with him through the personality of the girl in his story.

The music tapered off with the stealth of a dream, and the Scribbler awoke to an acute pain-

fulness. A *peso!* The gods of his esthetic Olympus shuddered. It seemed obscene to offer her money, yet surely she expected it and, if he failed to give it, undoubtedly would demand it in a manner sufficiently brutal to destroy even the most persistent illusions. . . . The solution came with the suddenness of a rapier. In his pocket was a lacquered, nacre-inlaid cigarette-case from China, which, with its glossy black surface, its gentle flame of mother-of-pearl, seemed a fitting exchange for the exotic gift of her presence.

His last glimpse of the girl in the rose-madder dress was as she dropped the cigarette-case on the vestal whiteness of the table-cloth for the examination of her ballerina friends.

6

The memory of Estrella de Sala did not burn to ash in the sunlight of another day but played behind the Scribbler's thoughts like foxfire. He did not go directly to book passage for Zamboanga as he had planned, for his desire to visit the town seemed quenched; no, temporarily satisfied. Subtly, inexplicably, the girl in the rose-madder dress had taken its place. She fused

with its spirit, or rather with the spirit that he attributed to it. He felt that, after having seen her, he could write about Zamboanga without difficulty. What if he made some few minor errors in location? Would not the fire of his conception atone for the lack of naked facts? He tried to persuade his literary conscience that absolute authenticity in background was not necessary. But the argument left him unconvinced. He must go. . . . And if disillusion were waiting to spring at him? Could anything so intangible as disillusion destroy the living magnificence of Estrella de Sala? . . . The ship bound for Java would not sail until afternoon, and by that time . . . well . . .

Under a hot, brazen sun he rode across the Bridge of Spain, and along the Escolta, Manila's main business thoroughfare. It was as unimpressive as any Main Street in America. Street-cars clanged through the congested traffic, and automobiles and carriages contributed to the general noise and confusion. The Scribbler noticed a singular fact, almost a phenomenon in the tropics. Every one seemed to be in a rush. It was the breathless spirit of haste so essentially North American, persistent even under an equatorial sun. And as a consequence

of the speed and the heat, every one looked irritable, the worst in them brought to the surface by the scorching ultra-violet rays. The soldiers who slouched by were glistening with sweat, their khaki uniforms damp at the knees and back; and the men driving motor-cars gave voice to their impatience in ceaseless honks. White-clad women moved swiftly along the shaded sidewalks, chatting in an ineffectual, feverish manner suggestive of frayed nerves. To the Scribbler, the Escolta was eloquent proof of what he had recently come to believe, that the Anglo-Saxon races, and particularly that branch peculiar to North America, are out of their sphere in the tropics, where empire-building should be left to the Latins, or, perhaps, to the Dutch, both of whom (one because of innate laziness and the other through a stodgy temperament) have proved capable of retaining, at least simulating, a decent disposition under conditions distinctly unfavorable to light skins.

He dismissed his *calesa* at the Isabela Gate of Intramuros and entered the old city on foot, bound for a certain Gothic church locally famous for its beauty. In the brilliant morning sunlight the gray and white walls of the houses glared like those of a North African town.

The streets blazed with the effulgence of tropical daylight, and their dust was raised in a yellow film by moving vehicles and men. Near a corner of the inclosure stood the church, a dull pile of stones in the glare. Guided by a friar from the adjoining monastery he passed from tormenting sunshine into soft gloom that was diluted by the chromatic glow of stained-glass windows. Candles wavered in the far end, burning in anticipation of a service or, perhaps, to celebrate some saint's birthday. A few worshipers knelt facing the high altar where stood immutable figures of Santo Domínico, of San Antonio, of Santa Teresa and Mary Magdalen. The floor was of narra and molave—island woods. Despite the air of repose and religious harmony that pervaded, there was something inquisitional in the atmosphere, expressed in the tall candles, the ponderous gloom, and the worshipers who moved in awe of a terrifying God. It seemed a last gesture of Spain's intolerance. . . . In the Chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary was a simple image of Nuestra Señora and the Child. Here the Scribbler sensed a spirit exquisitely free of oppression, but the contact was brief, smothered by the atmosphere of the sacristy where gorgeous ecclesiastical robes were

brought forth from chests of kamagon wood.

From the sacristy they moved out into the sunlight. The priest, a genial old celibate, talked in a charming Victorian manner as he led the way to the monastery and through cloisters and refectories cool with gloom. He had been in the islands for more than ten years; part of the time in Luzón and part of the time in Mindanao. Manila, Cebu, Zamboanga . . .

Ah! Zamboanga! . . .

Yes, indeed! A delightful place. He had visited Zamboanga when he first came out; had been there several times since. An utterly charming city, and so quiet, sunk in a deeply religious atmosphere. Neat barracks, well-planned streets shaded with cocoa-palms and sanitary canals. The church had accomplished much there. The first Jesuits came in 1635. Now it was the seat of a bishop. There were many interesting places to see; the cathedral and Convent of Zamboanga, the Fortress of Our Lady of the Pillar, the Holy Shrine of . . .

To the Scribbler his words had the somberness of tolling bells; bells that proclaimed the funeral of a boyhood dream. Instantly, and instinctively, he knew that he would never go to Zamboanga. The resolution, even the desire, melted

like wax in a flame. He could not define the actual cause of his sudden decision. He knew it was not revolt against the possibility of finding Zamboanga church-ridden, for often an atmosphere so utterly Catholic lent a melancholy, old-world glamour. It was, perhaps, an acute premonitory flash warning him of the destruction of an ideal if he persisted in trying to make real a city of dreams. And, after all, was the disappointment so bitter? He had the flawless and flaming memory of the girl in the rose-madder dress. . . . The story of Spanish insolence in the Philippines, of Zamboanga, of the island wench and her conquistador lover, would smolder in his brain without ever scorching paper. That was the price of an illusion.

7

Manila lay some five hundred miles astern when, two nights later, the Scribbler came out of the gauzy silence of slumber into the throbbing quiet that pervades a great ship after midnight, to find a figure in blue dungarees standing in the doorway of his cabin.

" . . . Captain Jones presents his compliments, sir, and says to tell you that we 're pass-

ing the tip end of Mindanao; that Zamboanga is four points off the port bow."

The Scribbler slipped into dressing-gown and straw sandals and went up on deck.

Pale, immaculate gloom washed the promenade; and silence. The hush seemed measured and intensified by the great throbs that came up from the belly of the ship where amid grease and oil and metal entrails sullen furnaces were digesting a feast of fire. Woven through this cottony stillness was the hiss and crush of foam spinning past the hull. Beyond the rail, in what seemed another world, sky and sea were merged in a pulsing immensity of darkness, made mysterious by countless millions of eyes. A heavy calm flattened the water to glassy opaqueness; directly overhead a vanishing vomit of smoke gave an unreal quality to the stars, a transient beauty frail as the memory of dying light.

There was immense depth to the scene, an imposing tyranny that seemed to declare the permanence of sea and the evanescence of men. All the beauty and loneliness of living, all the splendor and agony of dying were invested in the tremendous sweeps of distance. . . . A night designed to make dreams a certainty and life without substance. And the Scribbler im-

agined that, borne across the calm from a coast low-lying and unseen, was a faint distillation of tropical fragrance; the savor of enchantment. It was like a rediscovered perfume of the past. He saw himself as a boy again brooding over the map of the world. And, suddenly, all of life seemed contained in a metaphor, a tremendous curve upward from boyhood to youth, with one sublime moment at the top, a moment of supreme fulfilment, worth all the dreary sterility of dead years and the somber emptiness of years unborn. That moment had come, lifting the very fact of existence into a region exalted and unearthly. He felt himself the possessor of a great secret, an antidote for despair and anguish. He was, for an instant, the master of Life and Death. . . . Brief, this exultation; and when it had gone he knew that he had felt the touch of true Romance, a spirit fleeting by invisibly yet leaving the proof of its passing, its authentic reality, printed upon his imagination.

EPISODE THE THIRTEENTH

The Country of Conrad

1

INDIA, figuratively, belongs to Kipling; Japan to Hearn; and the Malay Archipelago to Conrad. Politically, the India of Kipling is no more; it passed with Queen Victoria. And the Japan of Hearn is a shade dissipated by substantial modernity. But the Malay Archipelago, Conrad's archipelago, still exists, and with an air of permanence. It hangs in its transparent casing of sunlight like a string of emeralds displayed to the world—a relic of an adventurous period when East-Indiamen came staggering down the seas in quest of fabulous horizons and neat clipper-bows nosed westward with cargoes of slaves and spices. They remain unchanged, those islands, perhaps changeless, and "stand out in the everlasting sunlit haze like the remnants of a wall breached by the sea."[1]

The voyage from Manila to Batavia was an

[1] "Lord Jim."

excursion into enchantment. So calm was the sea, so cloudless the sky, that the vessel seemed to slip through a blue vacuity, leaving only a transient furrow on the water to tell of its passing. Farther down the curve of the earth we sailed, straight toward the equator. . . . Borneo traced itself faintly on the horizon, at first like a thin wire quivering in an electric globe, then gradually expanding into a blue-green segment. We came so close to land that, through the glasses, I could see white breakers slithering across the sand and an uncertain cloud of jungle hanging over the beaches like a carefully laid smoke-barrage. There was something savage and desperate in the remoteness of that coastline. It was a wall guarding the last stronghold of romance, a defiant challenge to the dwindling army of earth's adventurers. Beyond were stewing jungles and rivers green with fever; a wilderness peopled with creatures that no amount of profound research or preachment could make me believe were my brothers; these and God only knows what other stark realities; and yet I thrilled at the suggestion of incredible possibilities.

The melancholy beauty of that voyage. . . . Dawn: and the sea dreaming remote dreams,

dreams too chaste for men. Midday: and the world ringed by a clear horizon separating two hemispheres of blue. Sunset: and gloom of bronze, rose tissue in the west, saffron; and purple where the night was smoldering. Dusk: and a wind frail as cobweb; stars in the heather darkness. . . .

The China Sea astern; over the bow, invisible, the Straits and Java. A perpetual calm pressed the water into compact blueness. It was the calm of "The Shadow Line," of "The Secret Sharer." Yet what deviltry that concentrated indigo can generate! . . . Our cutwater split the blazing line of the equator. The coast of Pontianak off the port bow, unseen . . . and then Borneo behind . . .

A sea of peacock green, streaked with mauve in places; in others, blue as turquoise; and, in the distance, a string of jade islands. Gaspar Strait. On either side of the channel, barely immersed, were whelks of coral and crusty scars —reefs waiting to cicatrize some ship or send her to the bottom there to rot amid the marine ulcers and other wounds left by undersea eruptions. At the farthest end of the largest island stood a lighthouse, a slender shaft of anguish lifted above the livid sea. (Clouds were hurry-

ing upward in the west, like a dark armada.) Beside the lighthouse was a long whitewashed building with a red roof; both stood on a table of land below sage-green hills, and at their feet waves broke on a rock-strewn point. The mute pillar of white, raised above that desolate coast, had a look of ineffectualness that was not without dramatic power. Who tended that solitary light? I wondered. Surely some girl splendid as "Freya of the Seven Isles." And the light that each night dipped across the strait was the antenna of her lonelinesss. . . .

Then the cloud-armada dropped its volleys—sudden tropical rain that swept across the water with the swiftness of shells. The ship seemed cut off from the heat which played behind the shower in visible rays of sunlight. The lighthouse glistened a last time through the fume and drench. And then, quickly, the shower ceased. I could see it driving a gray wedge into the east. Beyond the bowsprit, in perpendicular sunlight, the Stolze Channel was opening into the Java Sea.

2

Invariably, I find, there is some individual who expresses the general mood of a place, who

seems, in fact, a human envelop for its emotions; and so when I think of Batavia, or of Java, I think of the Beach-comber. . . .

I first saw him on a quay at Tanjong Priok, the port of Batavia. Back of him a sign read: "Nederlandsche Stoomvart Maatschappij"; and over his head the corrugated iron roof of the warehouse blazed with reflected sunlight. I picked him out from a group of Javanese, Chinamen, and Netherlanders, not because he was dressed in ducks and was a white man, for there were other white men and many more conspicuous for their apparel than he, but because he wore, bound about his middle, a blue cummerbund. It lent him, instantly, an air of fastidiousness, a certain individuality that lifted him out of the crowd. From where I stood, gazing down from the promenade-deck, I could not see his face; it was absorbed in the shadow of a wide-brimmed straw hat. Yet I was sure that his physiognomy was as interesting as the figure he presented standing at the foot of the gang-plank waiting; waiting for what? It would be a brown face, I knew, and crinkled at the corners of the eyes as a result of the glare. And his business— A planter, perhaps from down in the Moluccas, and in Batavia for a holiday.

With characteristic swiftness I made him a figure of romance, a contemporary of *Lord Jim*. Then, as I watched him, he turned and followed one of the disembarking passengers beyond the warehouse—and out of my ken, I thought.

A few minutes later when I walked down the gang-plank I was besieged by batik-sellers, and in the confusion I forgot to look for the blue cummerbund. "Buy this pliss, sahib!" wailed a Hindu merchant, displaying a piece of batik palpably an imitation.[1] "Pliss! Nice piece genuine batik . . ." And suddenly, from behind, I heard a voice that transported me to my native South; not the negro drawl attributed to all Southerners (and which some have) but a pleasant slurring of words consistent with a languid climate. Moreover, the speaker had an accent peculiar to one State. I turned and beheld the man of the blue cummerbund talking with one of the ship's officers. He was not brown, as I had imagined, but singularly pale; a pallor that suggested that his complexion had absorbed

[1] Batik is a native cotton cloth that has been put through a wax-and-dye process, and is generally used for sarongs and slendongs. Real batik is the same on both sides, and, when rubbed, gives off a wax odor. A sarong is the one-piece garment that the Javanese wears about his waist; a slendong, a scarf often used by the women and tied over one shoulder to form a sling for a baby.

the sunlight instead of burning. Nor were his eyes crinkled at the corners. His skin was remarkably smooth, almost like a woman's, and it gave him a look of innocence and extreme youthfulness. His clothes fitted fairly well, were clean, but he wore them with the air of one ill at ease in freshly laundered garments. It had the effect of hinting that the clothes were not his own.

As usual, I followed an impulse.

"Excuse me," I interrupted; "are n't you from Georgia?"

He grinned. "My gosh! Are you?"

Of course the "gosh" was something of a shock, for one would prefer "damn" or a word more picturesque from a person whom fancy had invested with romantic possibilities.

I said that I had attended a military school in Georgia.

"Well, I 'm not exactly from Georgia, either," he explained. "I went to school for a while at Tech. Great guns, man, you 're the first Georgian, or half-Georgian, I've seen in two years! Going up to Weltervreden now?"

I was; and I asked him to ride along with me. (Weltervreden is the new quarter of Batavia, some seven or eight miles from Tanjong Priok.)

"Can't right now, thanks," he said. "But

I 'll drop in to see you later. About noon; how 's that? What hotel?"

"Des Indes."

I should like to say that he appeared rather uncomfortable at encountering, in that distant place, one from the community where he went to school; but I cannot do it truthfully. However, I can say that as I left him there on the quay (beneath the sign "Nederlandsche Stoomvart Maatschappij" and the blazing corrugated-iron roof) he had a quality of remoteness from actual life, a peculiar solitariness that brought to my mind a picture of *Lord Jim* standing on the dock at Bangkok or one of those Oriental ports whither he journeyed in quest of a vanishing ideal.

The motor ride from Tanjong Priok to Weltervreden verified all the extravagant stories I had heard of the prodigal beauty of the Netherland East Indies, or, as Douwes Dekker called them, the Insulunde. Most of the way the road ran parallel with a river—a river such as Conrad surely meant the river at Patusan to be, sluggish brown, and on its banks, in hot shade, palms that flagged and hung motionless in the heat. Women were pounding their washing in the shallow water; women

brown as the river, and with skins so clear and soft that their bodies seemed sheathed in tawny silk. Splendid types; features of Greco-Indian mold, figures like bronze-plated statues. There was magnificent freedom in their movements, grace unrestrained by the vulgarities of Western dress. A twist of colored cloth about the waist, a scarf hooded Madonna-like over the head, and the chaste contours of a burnished breast. . . . The scenery formed a fitting background for these women. I have never seen such prolific soil, such brilliant green leaves. In the palpitating, throbbing sunlight the trees (tamarinds, njamplongs, and cocoa- and banana-palms) seemed to quiver with an intensity of color that hurt the vision. The flaming verdancy devoured the white sky, the white sunlight, with fierce hunger, like a chemical spray eating through gauze; and I felt like a beholder in some chromatic war where green, mad green, destroyed all other hues.

To enter Weltervreden is to be initiated into the incongruous effect of a liaison between Holland and the tropics. Squat houses, whitewashed and tile-roofed, and stores bearing Dutch lettering, stolidly acclaim that Java is part of the Netherlands, while profuse growths

—sweet-smelling shrubs, palms, banians and Madagascan flame-trees—laugh at the insolence of such an assertion. In the roadways, wheeling by in the hot dust, are *sados* and victorias, occasionally a motor-car. The majority of the natives are on foot, and represent Asia as well as the Archipelago: Chinese, Malays, Javanese, Sudanese, and Madurese. The Dutchmen who ride along in automobiles or behind Timor ponies (rarely do they walk) have a manner that makes plain the fact that they are superior to the natives, indeed to a great many of the visitors, some of whom are noisome writers who go home and publish nasty things about their colonial government. It is a superiority vastly different than that of the British in that it is oblivious of challenge; a stolid Dutch egotism, admirable as a race characteristic but often odious in the individual. It would be interesting to know whether unreasoning national vanity is at the bottom of this or sound conviction, worked out by the individual himself, that the average white man is a more highly evolved product of the human race than the men of darker skins. I suspect that politics has a lot to do with it, particularly in the Dutch East Indies or in any tropical colony where a comparatively small

number of white men impose their civilization upon millions of benighted natives.

I know very little about politics. It is a subject that does not interest me greatly except as proof that men, with a few notable exceptions, all have an innate common streak. In regard to the rule of Holland in Java and her other island possessions, I would say that its history is no more corrupt than the history of colonial policy in any conquered country where the white man is administrator and the dark man subject. On the surface, Java appears to be a thriving Dutch colony whose rich soil spawns a golden harvest of coffee and spices, and where the languorous atmosphere, the absence of revolution or other forms of protest, testify to the fact that Holland's administration is above reproach. I have no reason to believe it otherwise. None. And yet . . . I don't like the cowed look that comes into the eyes of a Javanese in the presence of Dutch civilians. The Javanese are not a servile race, not of the temperament to cringe like the low-caste East Indians, nor have they the evasiveness of the average Chinese. I admire the Javanese; I admire them more than any Asiatic or Malay race with the exception of the Burmese. Their love of beauty is evident in

their dress, their dramas, in their legends and all forms of art. There is something classical about their civilization, something reminiscent of ancient Greece. They are, I believe, the Greeks of Malaysia; a fact emphasized by the relics of Greco-Indian art found among the Brahmanic and Hindu ruins scattered over the island.

I made the statement that Dutch policy in Java is no more corrupt than that of other powers who have extended their empire down toward the equator; I was not excusing the Dutch. Moderation in cruelty does not justify the act; and the policy of Holland is no more justifiable than the policies of other nations who are guilty of the same corruption in a greater degree. Her participation in the ceaseless war of white against brown simply indicts her along with the French, the British, the Germans, and the Americans; that is to say, with the majority of the white race. I have seen revolting brutality, injustice, insolence, and bigotry in French possessions, in British India, in what was German East Africa, and in Hawaii and the Philippines. This cruelty is not always expressed in acts of physical violence, but more often in words, in manner; in the suppression of national

and racial individuality, and in an intolerance that is nothing less than ignorance. *Salés cochons,* niggers, *Schwein,* yellow bastards. . . . These are the anathemas of the French *légionnaire,* the British-Indian civil servant, the Dutch and German administrator, and the American soldier. . . . Here, boy! A whisky-soda! Quick, God damn you! Or . . . Why, you swine, get out of my way! . . . And seduction is one of the particular privileges of the white skin. . . . The climate, you know. No decent white man can stand it. Must do something. And these wenches—well, what are they for, anyhow? . . . To repeat, I know little about politics. I know more about the conduct of the individual acting in some political capacity.

3

The des Indes. A rather pleasant sound. Anything could happen consistently in a hotel so designated. I doubt if anything ever does. But the place, in appearance as well as name, suggests fabulous possibilities. That morning as I rode into the inclosure (most hotels in Java are built in compounds) I was certain that the des Indes was to be the background for a pleasant

adventure, of which the man of the blue cummerbund was, surely, the central figure. By the main building—a porticoed, whitewashed affair—was a monster banian, a giant of a tree whose writhing, many-branched trunk seemed to twist down out of the leaves like all of Medusa's locks crawling from a nest of green. Across from this building was a loggia where merchants of brass and batik displayed their wares. In the rear were other buildings, all whitewashed and red-roofed, and glaring in the morning sunlight. Spattering the blanched walls were trees and shrubbery, tracing a pattern of vivid green. It was a place that immediately promised the comfort of a cool veranda and an iced drink at the elbow.

My room was in one of the out-buildings, a spacious and unique apartment. Rooms, as well as individuals, have distinctive personalities, even a place in the social scale; and my room at the des Indes was an aristocrat among rooms, at once haughty without being overpowering, and evincing just the proper degree of cordiality. Facing the quadrangle was a partly inclosed veranda, red-tiled and given a tropical air by ratan furniture, and, beyond this, reached through swinging doors, a sleeping apartment

with green blinds and terra-cotta tiling. Mosquito-nets made a white, ethereal loom in the cool interior dusk. In the rear was a bath-room, a most singular arcanum into which I was initiated later. In addition to a shower-apparatus, there was a short trough and a triangle basin of considerable depth built into the wall. At one side of the bath-room was a door opening upon a back veranda, beyond which were ramshackle native huts half-smothered in trees. Undoubtedly I was in a hostelry superior to *Mr. Schomberg's* in Surabaya;[1] yet the atmosphere was essentially the same, supremely Conradish, and I was positive that, with nightfall, I would be serenaded by *Zangiancomo's* Ladies' Orchestra, and see *Lena* and *Baron Heyst* trysting in the gloom.

My acquaintance of the dock (he of the blue cummerbund) arrived about noon, and, while we sat on the veranda and talked of home, I was introduced to a Batavian sherry cobbler. The ingredients? I do not know; nor do I care to know and destroy the delightful mystery that hangs over it. I have no desire to mix a sherry cobbler in the Occident; it belongs to the tropics, more particularly to Batavia. . . . It is a miracle

[1] Conrad's "Victory."

of color. A pale amber at the top, it ripens, shading downward through a kaleidoscope of ice, to a deep sherry brown. Crushed between the ice are bits of golden fruit and the brilliant crimson of a cherry. It is like drinking enchantment. The effect, after several minutes, is an exalted communion with all the amenities of earth and regions ambrosial.

I was certain, as we sat there sipping the cool liquor, that my acquaintance would unfold a dramatic past. But, although he talked of home-town and college days, there was little of personal history in his conversation. This may have been deliberate; I hoped it was, for the fact that he avoided speaking of himself savored of mystery. However, I wanted to know something of the motive or motives that had brought him to Java, the emotional forces back of his Odyssey. And I know that he 'd had an Odyssey, for he spoke familiarly of Yokohama, Mukden, Peking, Shanghai, and Singapore. Prosaic enough, probably, I reasoned. Yet he had the air of an adventurer, an interesting carelessness that I had tried to cultivate without success. I was determined at least to learn his business, and the only way I could find out was to ask. He grinned—a pleasant, reckless grin, rather

haunting because of the sheer youthfulness of it.

"Well," he said, "I 'm the fellow you read about in lots of books. Yep. I 'm a beach-comber, an honest-to-God beach-comber. According to the books, I ought to go around unshaven and dirty, begging for drinks at some lousy Oriental bar. But I don't; at least, I don't go unshaven and dirty. Sometimes I work, and sometimes I loaf. Why, man, I 'm as versatile as the proverbial banker who takes up the collection on Sunday and robs poor people all the other days of the week! Jesus! I 've done everything from a trick at the wheel to a one-night stand with a theatrical troupe in Singapore!"

Under the surface hardness inflicted by unconventional travel lay an inherent refinement, evident in his voice and the unconscious gentility of his bearing. And it was plain that he wanted me to know that, whereas he had spent his childhood and youth in pursuit of orthodox culture, the early years of his manhood had been invested in seeing a lot of earth's iniquity.

"I 'm in a new business now," he went on; "at least, new to me. Selling batik. Yep, real batik. I go around and browbeat the natives; buy it cheap—you see, I speak the language a

little—and then I sell it to tourists at a big price. Not exactly fair, but—well, a man has to live; now does n't he? God knows I don't make much out of it. Why, man, would you believe me, I 've slept with natives and eaten their damned heathen food!" He chuckled. "Almost married one. Yep. I was drunk at the time. She promised to make batik for me. . . . Women! . . . And these women out here! Hell! Fat Dutch housewives, yellow-haired girls, and brown wenches. Of course, my business puts me in the class of the brown wenches. But they 're not a bad lot, these Javanese women. Nope. Rather like 'em. Swear I do."

He was a peculiar composite, this chap. Immediately I could see, back of his talk, an almost childish sensitiveness. He was, in the vernacular, on his uppers. He hoped that I 'd help him. But he would n't ask it. So potent are the bonds that weave back to college days! The mere fact that he and I had attended school in the same city instantly tinctured our contact with an intimacy that was extraordinary in that it would permit informality on his part, but not over-familiarity, such as asking for money. He would accept any hospitality I offered so

long as it did not involve the gift of cold dollars. There was a certain ironic twist in the situation. Our mutual past in America, no matter how distant that relationship, or whether actual or imaginary, was magnified by the fact that we were two white men in the tropics with something in common; and it entitled him to share my social freedom as a traveler when, technically, he was a pariah, between the worlds. This sudden elevation, supported by props of sheer sentiment, made his every act revolve on an exaggerated point of honor. Or, rather, so I fancied. But whether this was true or not, it gave our association an aspect of uniqueness.

I asked him to stay to tiffin, knowing beforehand that he would.

"Ever hear of a rice-table?" he queried. "Dutch call it *rijst tavel.* Suppose we indulge in it—oh, it 's an indulgence all right! If you want atmosphere you 'll certainly get it in a rice-table!"

And the *rijst tavel* was an indulgence, indeed. Coming after the enchantment of sherry cobblers it was something of an insult. The plate was heaped with rice, then overlaid with slices of chicken and peppery relish. On top of this were piled shredded raw fish, roast duck, curry,

chutney, grated cocoanut, pickles, almonds, fried bananas, palm-shoots, and sambals. . . . And after this mountain of food had been devoured, or, as in my case, partly devoured, came dessert and coffee! Dreadful Java coffee, a black, concentrated syrup, devastating in its effect upon the nerves.

After tiffin I managed to reach the veranda and sink into an arm-chair. Across the compound, in dappling shade, a troupe of Javanese dancers were performing. A band of cruel sunlight separated them from us, and it had the effect of lending distance, of segregating actors from audience. The dancers were five girls, all tiny as Japanese women, and sheathed in velvet jackets and tightly bound sarongs. Accompanying them were four male musicians. The music interested me more than the dance, for I felt that it held the soul of Java imprisoned in its wailing notes. A flow of bronzen tones rose from a graduated series of thirteen gongs, its swelling harmony lanced at intervals by attenuated screeches from a Persian violin, and given a monotonous cadence by the beating of a drum. It was haunting music, a bit grotesque, certainly individual. It possessed a *bizarrerie* peculiarly Javanese; it was quaint as the people and eccen-

tric as the mythological figures in their wayang dramas;[1] and it had a persistent wistfulness, almost a wild hungering that lingered in the imagination. The dance itself was a disappointment. I had heard much of the Javanese dancing, of its classical beauty, inspired by stories from the "Mahabharata" and the "Ramayana." What I saw that afternoon was either childishly naïve or simply stupid. The women stood in rows and made vague gestures, now and then summoning enough energy to turn around completely or break into fragmentary song; they crooked their arms and hands, and twisted their bodies in angular movements reminiscent of the ancient pantomimes carved on the walls of the Boro-Budur and other Hindu monuments in Java. There was none of the suggestiveness of Polynesia or North Africa in the dance. It was an expression of a little-known phase of the East, the chaste East of mythology, a naked spirit purified by religious fires.

The dance went on indefinitely, with brief intermissions; and after we had watched for a while the Beach-comber made some excuse and departed. But before he left I asked him to return to dinner. I wanted to know something of

[1] Puppet shows.

the mysterious (and fastidious) past, of which the blue cummerbund seemed an eloquent gesture. My interest was not the cruel, incisive probing of a writer seeking to get at the very entrails of a character, nor was it impertinent curiosity, but a healthy desire to know more of what I fancied was a unique, at least a romantic personality.

When he had gone I retreated to my room for a siesta and, as a result of the black coffee, spent a wakeful hour watching lizards flash across the ceiling.

4

Javanese Polychromes

(Pictures sketched into my notebook after a drive through Weltervreden and Old Batavia)

Noordwick . . . a roadway running stiff as whalebone across the girth of Weltervreden. On one side are shops and restaurants, their Dutch signs frowning at the tamarinds that flourish a few yards away. At tables in the restaurants sit florid *Schombergs* and *Heysts* and women like those in "Falk." Mugs of foam rest between them. Children, sitting two in a chair or twisting on one foot, are sucking hopjes. Wheeling by in *milords,* or victorias, are pomp-

ous Netherlanders who appear uncomfortable in their high-collared, starched linens; the drivers, small Javanese men, or Malays, uniformed in khaki, have the same look of stiffness. . . . A thin shower falls suddenly, freckling the dust with drops like discolored quicksilver. The leaves of the tamarind-trees are streaked with brilliant lacquer, and a little shiver of coolness passes through the air. . . . The rain has stopped. Sunlight pours down weirdly from a gray-bright sky in which there is no sun. . . .

Passar Baroe . . . a bazaar quarter south of the Tjiliwoeng River. In the Chinese streets, lemon-colored men and black ideographs; beyond, dusty roads that weave through Javanese and Indian bazaars. Displayed in the windows are fans of caribou-gut, painted and patterned, some done in black gold and henna, others in blue and lavender and gilt, and all stamped with mythological figures—Indra or Santone or Tjitraska. Inside, in soft gloom, are brasses and batik; sarongs with Persian panels or blue peacocks, and slendongs of cotton and silk, batiked or embroidered. . . . I stop the car and enter one of these shops. A boy is standing by a shelf of idols gazing at a figure of Arjuna. (I did not know it was Arjuna until I asked;

then he told me, with a shy smile, that that was the gentleman's name.) Undoubtedly he was a very magnificent personage in his time; proof of it is the image of him, made hundreds of years after his death, and painted with green and flesh-color and gold. . . . But I am more interested in the boy: he wears a simple sarong, and from beneath its dragging panel Arab sandals protrude. His torso is bare, the skin clear and brown, flawless as a child's. Almost concealing his glossy hair is a black velvet cap such as the men of Java wear. The point of it comes down over one eye in an impertinent manner. He is rather bashful, but I manage to make him talk; of Arjuna and the other gods and goddesses on the shelf. It ends by my paying two guilders for Arjuna and receiving a gentle smile from somber black eyes. . . .

Old Batavia . . . a human warren lying close to swamps that breathe fevering exhalations over the quarter. A street of low Dutch houses, identical with hundreds of streets in Holland; or an alley plunging between Chinese hovels; or a roadway where Arabs and half-castes move against a serried line of Malay kampongs. I can smell a malarial stench. Or perhaps it is only my fancy; for I know that this is the spot

where the first Dutch settlers died in appalling numbers from fever and dysentery. In the street, as I pass, I see a yellow baby patting dung cakes. A coolie swings by lithely with bent carrying-pole. From his buckets drip two tiny streams that bead the dust with mud. On a veranda, lounging upon a *baleh-baleh,* or string-mattress, is a Malayan Circe who smiles at me half contemptuously and half invitingly. . . .

A suburb. . . . Purple flowers smoldering below a blanched wall; trees that scent the air with an aching sweetness. It is the sunset hour. A dying glare photographs the red clay roofs in vivid tiles upon the greenery, and white houses, bright with reflected light, glimmer in compounds overgrown with tropical plants. . . . In the middle of the road walks a bird-seller, bamboo cages swinging from a bamboo pole, and a white cockatoo balancing on his shoulder. . . . The atmosphere is clabbering. . . . From a cross-road, announced by the rattle of accoutrements and the beat of hoofs, comes a troop of Dutch Colonial Calvary; tall, fair men whose uniforms are colorless in the dusk. With a clink and throb they pass, vanishing like phantom riders through the dust that rolls up from the dry earth. . . .

5

It was after dark when I returned from the drive, and the Beach-comber was waiting on my veranda. Clad in his linens (the same suit, for doubtless he had no other), and with his broad shoulders and his cadet's waist emphasized by the blue cummerbund, he was a cool, challenging figure in the gloom. In fact, he startled me, for he seemed a substantial duplicate of something intangible, something visible only to the mind—a character out of my imagination. I cannot stress too much the romantic qualities of the man. Undoubtedly he had a more potent claim upon my fancy because he was the epitome of what I always had wanted to be. To me, as a child, the map of the world was a great web that invited, that urged me to forsake orthodox learning for the ripe erudition of a beach-comber's life. But ambition had begun to stir; I went the conventional way of school and college, but always carrying with me the dream; a dream that continually released a sweetness as of lavender into my thoughts. And now, suddenly, in a place dramatic as Conrad's Patusan, or any tropical isle of fiction, I had encountered one who was the fulfilment of that dream. It was like

coming face to face with a part of myself. I remember the strange shock, the thrilling, tremendous hurt that smote me as I realized this. All the yearning seemed quenched, as though I had realized my desire through another body.

We had dinner in a spacious white room where lizards darted across the ceiling. The Beachcomber talked—of the future, not the past. He 'd leave Batavia in a month or more, or whenever he made enough money to move on. Where would he go? Oh, Samarang or Surabaya. And then? Farther on. Bali. He 'd heard a lot about the women of Bali. . . . Stop off at Timor, then go on to Thursday Island. And after that? A ship somewhere—perhaps to New Caledonia. That was the old French penal colony; might be interesting. Of course, circumstances might send him off in another direction, but he preferred to go westward across the Pacific. South America was his objective; French and Dutch Guiana, then Peru and Bolivia. He 'd like to go into the Andes or take a run up the Amazon; did n't matter which; both sounded attractive . . .

Then would he go home? I suggested.

Oh, no; there would still be a lot of the world left. He intended to rove until he was about

forty-five; then he 'd settle down somewhere in the tropics, "to rot," as he put it.

I could not help admiring the sheer worthlessness of the man; and my admiration was tinctured with envy. Here was an iconoclast who dared to laugh at a progressive world, to ridicule, by his actions, an Age of Efficiency. It was splendid heresy.

"I like the laziness of it all," he said. "Hell! There 's nothing romantic about it! All this South Sea talk is crap. Nope, there 's nothing romantic about the islands. It 's the looseness that attracts me; whisky and sleep. I 'm not immoral because I never was moral. Maybe you think I 'm pretty bad, but I get a lot of fun out of being—well, cosmopolitan in my habits. I like the tropics—I like the silence. God, man! no other part of the world can be so quiet! I have time to think here; I think a lot; and do you know what I think?"

He leaned across the table and sank his bright blue glance into me.

"I think they 're all wrong over there"—with a gesture intended to take in Europe and America. "They consider it treason to believe that any other part of the world is just as good as their own. They think drama is profound; they think

books are profound; and the best thing a man can do is to try to be clever. Why, Christ! they 're all off! God did n't make drama; God did n't make books; and I don't think he intended people to be clever in the way that cleverness is interpreted nowadays. He made different countries, different people; and he meant for human beings to see them, to get something from each. But they don't want to. And when I say 'see' I don't mean just to come and look on as tourists and missionaries do; I mean to *see straight;* to realize that, sometimes, a nigger 's as good as a white man; that yellow and brown and black people are n't necessarily heathen; that they don't worship idols any more than you or I do. . . . Hell! Everybody worships idols. Maybe it 's a woman; maybe it 's a cross; or maybe it 's just a piece of wood carved and painted to look like a god. What 's the difference? They 're all symbols. Often I think that people are symbols, too; sort of a joke that God played on earth. . . .

"And missionaries . . . Well, I guess I 've seen too many of 'em. Most of 'em are sincere —I suppose. But, essentially, their principle 's wrong. Their church is wrong. They 're not Christians; they 're Baptists or Presbyterians or

Episcopalians. Now, honestly, do you suppose God cares whether the Lutheran Church has more members than the Catholic? And do you reckon that Jesus Christ would recognize the religion that 's named after him? . . . No, I don't like missionaries. Main reason is this: the average preacher who comes out does n't know the truth about any religion except his own, or, if he does, he hides his knowledge. Is that fair? Sectarianism! My God! Preachers are concerned too much with Baptist souls or Methodist souls!

"Listen. I know a missionary who came out and saw clear; he saw that what Jesus Christ taught was being twisted around to fit into the narrow catechisms of various churches. He saw he did n't have anything to offer the heathen. He did n't become a Buddhist or anything like that; he became—well, I guess you 'd call it just a plain worshiper of Something Unknown. And do you know what that man did? Of course he left his church; and after that he started a sort of hotel where men, white, yellow, brown, and black, could go and get food or a place to sleep. And what do you suppose happened? Why, he did n't make a go of it. The white fellows did n't like to associate with Chinks and Hindus,

and the nice people of the town thought he was a crazy heretic. I don't know what 's become of him. Perhaps he 's gone to the devil. I would n't blame him if he had; would you?"

We adjourned to my veranda. I wondered, now that he had begun to talk, if he would reveal the tremendous motives that had sent him up and down the earth, investing his youth in precious learning; learning that would never leave his mind except through fragmentary conversations such as I had just heard. That these motives were tremendous I had no doubt; the man himself was too picturesque to be the product of conventional circumstance. We sat in darkness, by the ratan table; and the Beachcomber called for a "boy" in bastard Malay . . . "Djongus! Ajer batoe, whisky-stengah! Pigi! . . . Saja, Tuan![1] . . ." The quadrangle was a jungle of shadows, some animated, as a breeze, treacherously sweet, crept through the foliage. Overhead, the sky was prodigal with flecking gleams. The night, with its dimness and its silence, had a tragic immensity, a quality of velvet heaviness that seemed to muffle the whole world. It was possible, in that hush, to

[1] Boy! Ice and whisky-soda! Be off!
Yes, master!

believe in deathless Romance. Or to believe, when the faint whimper of music came from the main building, that *Zangiancomo's* Ladies' Orchestra was serenading the guests of the des Indes; that *Lena* and *Baron Heyst* were trysting somewhere in the ambient starlight; and that *Lord Jim* sat behind the glowing cigar on my right. And the illusion was complete when the "boy" emerged from the shadows with the soft tinkle of ice. . . . Surely, I thought, this atmosphere will challenge him to talk freely! And it did.

Between sips (and the "boy" came and went many times) the Beach-comber uncovered the gold and the rust that he had dug from life's sands. He talked of naked emotions in naked words. He had no illusions about himself; none about the world. He had scrubbed decks and floors; he had mingled with outcasts; he had lived with a Eurasian woman in Singapore. But he had always managed to hold to certain ideals of fastidiousness, particularly with regard to clothes. Sometimes the latter was difficult; usually he had to go to bed while his one suit was being washed. . . . He thought the Turks were gentlemen and the Armenians dogs; Egypt was simply a vast museum exploited by the

British to attract travelers and trade and thus maintain the supremacy of the white race, and particularly of the British Empire, in North Africa; Indian mysticism was a fake; the French were cruel colonizers; and the Japanese were sincere in their professed friendliness, and more likable than the Chinese. . . .

I suggested a walk, and we abandoned the silence of the des Indes for the silence of the streets. Gray stars gave the sky a dark luster; and stars lay in the black canals. The warm air reeled with the perfume of lantana and other blossoms. Now and then a *sado* rattled past. Few people were abroad, and the desertion of the roads was only emphasized by the bright-windowed houses that lined them.

It was late when we returned to the hotel, and my clothes were moist from exertion. The Beach-comber shook hands with me at the gate; he 'd see me in the morning. As he turned to go (to go where? I wondered) I called him back, remembering what he 'd said about sleeping with natives. There were two beds in my room.

"Why, yes, you bet I 'd like to stay," he responded. "Jesus, man, I have n't felt clean sheets in so long! . . ."

And he laughed in a manner that made me detest myself for trying to trap his secrets. And I was trying. In retrospect, it seems cruel, almost devilish, for I was leading him into the confessional of darkness where often men bare their wounds. It was deliberate; and I was more interested in what he might tell than in the act of providing a clean bed.

We smoked in darkness for a while. Lizards rasped on the ceiling, and, outside, faint sighs were wrung from the palms. . . . Our cigarette-ends died out. As I lay there, sunk in the dim pallor of the mosquito-net, I fancied that the Beach-comber, lying an arm's-length away in another gauzy cloud, was struggling with a story that was determined to leave his tongue, challenged by darkness and companionship. The situation had a dramatic aspect, and I thrilled like a boy awaiting the confidence of a new friend. Perhaps he needed encouragement. If I talked of a girl, any girl associated with a poignant affair of extreme youth, it might touch some sharp, sweet hurt in his heart, perhaps the very wounded dream that had sent him to the beach.

There was a girl, I began, and we . . . well,

you know, one of those affairs innocent and naïve yet curiously persistent . . . the sort that clings but becomes an affection wholly imaginary. . . . She married and then . . .

And then I heard the sound of heavy breathing from the next bed.

6

One rises early in the tropics to enjoy the magic hours that weave chilly night into sweltering day; and shortly before seven o'clock the Beach-comber and I had *chota-hazri,* or "little breakfast," on the veranda. Horrible black coffee and delicious golden mangos; coffee that made me shudder, and iced fruit that left a cool, sharp flavor. Mangos, with their dripping juiciness, their faintly wild taste, belong to the countries of romance, to the tropics, and particularly to such mornings as that one, sweet with wine-like air and moist green shadows.

I was leaving for Buitenzorg on an early train, and the Beach-comber rode to the station with me. Along the way women were washing in the canals, making use of the precious young day. Natives hurried by with gliding swiftness—fruit

venders carrying pomelos and mangosteens snared in their baskets like russet and purple moons—and slim, dark men bent on the simple, almost childish errands of a gentle people. A faint mist, dew-drenched, gave the palms, the drooping waringen-trees, the bougainvillea and poinsettia bushes a soft, smoldering quality, and they glowed in the smoky gray like colored embers. Damp fragrances came up from the ground, breathed out from the foliage and flowers, seemed even to descend from the bending branches, all mingling in a vaporous pool of scents.

At the Koningsplein Station the Beachcomber and I parted. As we shook hands I felt a thrust of fear that was almost a premonition. Who could tell what impulse might take him away before I returned?—he who seemed a person of such tremendous impulses! He had promised to meet me at the des Indes three days later. But his promises! And he looked so undependable as he stood there beneath the station-shed—a slender figure in white, with sunburn like rust on his black hair. . . . As the train pulled out I felt that I was losing some vital contact with my own boyhood, that period of wild dreams and dangerous yearnings.

7

That ride to Buitenzorg gave me a glimpse into the lush green heart of Java. Such Circean loveliness! The paddy-fields, or *sawahs,* their succulent blades half immersed, lay like lazuli mirrors cracked and speared by arrows of jade. The red earth seemed fairly to burst with tropical growths. Rubber- and cocoa-palms arched lithely above tangles of apple-green, of olive and emerald, and æruginous roots looped over the ground or sunk their hungry tentacles deep into the soil. Buffaloes were bathing in jungle pools. Frequently a drift of azure smoke, purling up from the greenery, betrayed an invisible kampong. Now and then the forests thinned to reveal a bamboo and grass dwelling or a group of native huts; or to offer a clear view of drenched *sawahs* and valleys that spread away to the hills. Men and women stood thigh-deep in the paddy-fields, pausing in their work to stare at the "iron-elephant-with-a-heart-of-fire" that went raging by.

Shortly after ten o'clock low white houses announced Buitenzorg. A *sado* took me swaying over dusty roads, under a russet sun, to the hotel, a series of blanched, red-roofed buildings drows-

ing in the midst of listless palms. My room was in the rear, opening upon a veranda that hung, gallery-like, over a valley that dipped through green groves to the foot of Mount Salak. The great mountain rose out of the brassy heat like a pile of blue ash, seeming so unsubstantial that the faintest breeze might whip it into dusty flurries. However, Salak was in no danger from the wind: all the air was pressed into a tangible cloud of heat that dropped upon the valley and crushed the palms, the shrubbery, and the houses into flat relief.

Instead of visiting the Botanical Garden, as I had intended, I sat on the veranda and contemplated the futility of exertion in the tropics. A pleasant exhilaration was introduced into this mood by a frosty drink shot with the iridescent green of crême de menthe. Back in my brain a story was smoldering, a story sunk deep in voluptuous atmosphere. Appalling heat and listless palms . . . a chilled drink of enchanting color. Placed in such a setting, the story inevitably would have to do with raw emotion. A woman imperfectly evolved; a man struggling with a moral flaw; and here they should meet and work out their destinies. . . . The awful heat seemed to blast these figures. They

shriveled in my imagination, gradually shrinking until they were cremated.

That afternoon, when the glare had softened, I walked through the market-place. Yellow roadways unrolled between lazy shops, and the sunlight seemed burnished as a few rattling wheels lifted the dust. In the fruit bazaar the air was burdened with over-ripe smells. Tawny men sat cross-legged in the midst of piles of mangos and durians and custard-apples. The cloth-market, adjoining the fruit bazaar, was an immense shed where long aisles, aromatically cool with the waxy odor of batik, wandered among numerous stalls. Hundreds of pieces of batik, worked in Javanese designs and weird mythological figures, hung in panels in little alcove-like shops. Sienna and ocher and bister and gamboge. Most of the sarongs were of these hues; were hung close together, merging into vast pieces of dark tapestry that seemed to tone the intruding sunlight to twilight.

I paused at one stall, attracted by a slim little creature who smiled at me from the midst of countless sarongs. Her skin was the color of burned ivory, was silken smooth, and sheathed a form of miniature loveliness. A flower was in her hair; tiny rings in her ears. Her jacket was

fuchsia red, and her sarong, held in place by a silver belt, a creamy tan batiked with an intricate design in maroon and night blue. This design was quite extraordinary. On the field of pallid tan were six-leaved flowers and fragile sprays like maidenhair fern, their delicacy emphasized by a heavy Persian panel, elaborately conceived, that formed the end. Wrapped tightly around the curve of the girl's hips, it had a clinging loveliness that was charming.

I asked its wearer if she had another just like it, and, with a gesture for me to wait, she ran to the rear and called between the batik hangings. A fat, mustached man appeared, evidently her father.

How could he serve me?

I wanted a sarong like the one his daughter was wearing, I replied.

"Not daughter," he informed me solemnly; "wife." And he added that he had none exactly like that. However, he could have one made.

No, I was leaving too soon.

Well, then, he would sell me the one his wife had on.

Oh, no, indeed! I could not deprive her.

He ignored me and spoke to his wife in Javanese. She giggled; vanished in the rear. A

moment later she reappeared, still giggling, her hips swathed in cloth of russet and purple and carrying the creamy tan sarong. She continued to titter as she wrapped the parcel.

"Salaamat jalan!" she said as I left, bending low with a smile.

After an hour or so of wandering in the bazaar, I returned to the hotel. Mount Salak, no longer immersed in a heat-haze, asserted itself in definite blue. Dusk floated up from the valley, and fireflies made a vanishing pattern in the palm-grove. It was the magic time of tropical twilight, and dead dreams came to life and prowled. For one poignant moment the world swam in lilac, then somber darkness rushed out of the East.

8

The following morning I went to the Botanical Garden. As I entered the gate a vaporous green silence inclosed me. Dew, like crystal rain, shimmered in the amazing greenness and flung a million needles at the sun. A double row of royal palms guarded the approach to that empire of vegetation, admitting me into a jungle of kanari-trees, giant ferns, bamboo, pandanus, and other prolific growths. Through interstices in

the branches, as intricately designed as a cathedral window, the sunlight fell in lambent shafts. The effect was bewildering. My vision quivered, grew uncertain, and the trees seemed to dissolve into a tremulous green mist. I moved through wavering tunnels of leaves and beside a lake that flung an incredible glare at the sky. Swans drifted on the water in feathery clouds. Seen between hanging branches, over tiny islands and curling lotus-leaves, was a long white house; mansion of his Excellency the Governor.

I seemed lost in ocean-green twilight. Mailed dragon-flies flashed up from exotic tangles, and other insects lay drunk on the leaves of lilies and frangipani. The air was deadly sweet, was hot, and still as the depths of the sea. A faint rasp, a buzz, the lisp of leaves were the only sounds. But for the apparent cultivation, I might have been walking in some primeval forest where giant thunder-lizards and other flying mammals were likely to spring up suddenly and destroy the stupendous silence.

Hidden in reaches of luminous green were ponds and little streams. There was a satisfying restfulness in the dim, cool water. It immersed the vision in an imaginary moisture that seemed actual to the throat. Strange patterns

of leaves, tapestries of plants and blooming trees traced themselves in the transparent haze, uncertain, deceptive. The earth breathed fragrances that were voluptuous and unhealthy. Paths glided into groves of palms, over arching bridges and through palisades of high grass.

One of these paths led me to a green island of shade beside a pool, and I sat down, wrapped in delicious coolness. The exotic quiet was a womb of fancies. It set me to dreaming. . . . And out of the plumy shadows, out of the incandescent heat, he came to me, the character for my story. He was a composite of the Beach-comber and a person of my imagination. I could see him striding along some desolate tropical coast, a blue cummerbund about his waist and sunburn like rust on his hair; seeking—seeking what? An illusion, a ghost of his past. And that past—Strangely complicated. I could visualize him as a boy, dreaming over the map of the world. In his house (a tall, gaunt house whose gables touched the sky) was a sarong hung on the wall, the gift of some adventurer who had voyaged to lands behind the sunset. A sarong of creamy tan batiked with an intricate design in maroon and blue . . . the only touch of romance in a gray household. To him it was the East, the

inscrutable East, and his destiny seemed woven into that intricacy of color and design. He knew that on some dim shore, in the midst of tropical loveliness, he had a tryst with Romance. . . . Then came a girl, a sudden erotic storm in which they bent like slender birches in the wind. Bound. Loose-leaf ledgers and adding-machines. And still the memory of a tryst on some dim shore; a memory that grew until white hands ceased to cling; until he broke free, deserting a women of flesh and blood for a shadowy siren. Then his saga began . . . along desolate tropical coasts . . . in quest of an illusion. Quest. He would be called that—Ethan Quest. In the name Ethan was a suggestion of his conventional youth. "Ethan Quest: His Saga." I could see the title written across a book. And the end of that Odyssey? Still striding along a desolate coast? Perhaps there was another finish, one that the Beach-comber might suggest. Disillusion, the rust of dreams, and settling down to the monotony of the equator with a brown woman who made batik for him to sell. . . .

9

The next day I returned to Batavia, filled with enthusiasm for my new novel. At the hotel I

inquired if the Beach-comber had called or left a message. The clerk's reply made me uneasy. I was sailing for Singapore the following day, and I had a very definite premonition that I would not see the Beach-comber again.

That presagement was verified with the passing of the next morning. He did not appear. I hoped up to the last minute that he would come swinging across the courtyard through the glare. But the Beach-comber, evidently, had vanished permanently. I was annoyed at his utter lack of responsibility. Undoubtedly I had been deluded by a clever adventurer, who probably worked the same hoax on other gullible travelers. Yet he had repaid me fully for the slight hospitality I had given: he had left me Ethan Quest.

It was sunset when I reached Tanjong Priok. My ship gleamed coolly at her moorings; and across the mirror inlet, bulking darkly against the west, was another vessel, a rusty vagabond of the seas. She had an air of romance, that wretched-looking craft, and upon inquiry I learned that she was a pilgrim ship bound for some Mediterranean port. Instantly I thought of the *Patna* in "Lord Jim." How singular that I should see her in reality, here in this

country of Conrad! She lay black against the sunset, against a furnace of peach-bloom and saffron, like the apotheosis of adventure.

And, suddenly, as I gazed across the inlet, I heard a familiar voice behind. me. . . . "By golly, I nearly missed you! . . ." His face seemed rather pale, rather dissipated, and his suit was soiled. But the blue cummerbund was there to add its unexpected touch of fastidiousness.

"I got to the hotel just after you left and rushed down here," he explained. "I 'm sorry not to have come sooner. But I indulged in a little party after you went to Buitenzorg, and I just snapped out of it this morning. Jesus! it was a hot one!"

We sat down, facing the pilgrim ship and the bleeding west. . . . In every life there are lifted moments, events that stand out from the scroll of monotonous existence like bas-reliefs, not always great happenings, but more often incidents seemingly insignificant. Suddenly, while moving in a dusky street, one finds unsuspected beauty in a passing countenance, a superb glance; and fancy nurtures a tender plant from the prosaic soil. . . . Such a moment was that

JAVANESE ACTORS

A SHRINE IN THE SHWÉ DAGON PAGODA

one, there in a setting so utterly unbelievable and with a character as fanciful as fiction.

And then the gong sounded for all visitors to go ashore. I think the Beach-comber was a little sorry to say good-by. A few yards away, as he swung down the deck, he paused, as if to turn back, as if to say something he had forgotten; then, without a backward glance, a motion, he disappeared into the companionway. That pause was pregnant. At that last moment—there in the swooping dusk, a psychological hour we are told—did he think to speak, to divulge some secret, some explanation for his incredible self? I wonder. Like *Marlow* facing the receding shores of Patusan, I felt a sense of stupendous and somber mystery. Ethan Quest would have to grope for his own salvation.

As we warped out from the dock I had a last picture of the Beach-comber standing beneath the sign "Nederlandsche Stoomvart Maatschappij" and the roof of corrugated iron, "white from head to foot . . . persistently visible with the stronghold of the night at his back, the sea at his feet . . ."

EPISODE THE FOURTEENTH

ADVENTURE: AN INTERLUDE BETWEEN SHIPS

MORNING on the Straits. A low green shore steals out of the blue, seeming to glide over the water toward us as the ship draws closer to land. Already the sun is furnace-hot. A splash of platinum burns the sea between the coast and the horizon, and in its center is a tiny native craft, like an insect caught in a flame. Behind that palm-fringed beach a great peninsula sweeps upward through forest and jungle to form the Golden Chersonese. It is the land of Ophir's buried hoard; it is Malaysia.

We move through the splash of platinum, past the dugout with its brown occupant, leaving a long burnished furrow to melt into the simmering green. A few houses appear on the shore, gray smears that run and merge with the forest background in the viscid, clinging heat. Singapore is announced by modern docks that lie stricken under the equatorial sun. As the ship warps in, a swarm of wharf-hands emerge from under the shed, their shadows crawling reluc-

tantly behind. Sweaty muscles glisten, brown bodies sway; the ship is made fast. Comes a rattle, a clamor of voices; then the gangway jerks down.

An awful blast smites me as I pass from the dim lower deck to the uncovered quay. The sunlight stabs my eyes and runs through my brain like fire. As I make my way toward the motor-cars beyond the wharf, the screams of coolies, of lascars and dock-venders seem to thicken the atmosphere.

A hot wind whirls up as the automobile leaps forward. We plunge through a humidity that is almost tangible. Trees, houses, roadways, all flash by in drifts of dust and visible heat-waves. I have a faint impression of a bridge spanning a crowded canal, an expanse of park; then we curve into a driveway and draw up in front of the Raffles Hotel.

I find my room sunk in sultry gloom, and so I descend to the spacious veranda café that faces the sea. Here, sitting at tables by the rail, are a few tropical types, sipping iced drinks and gazing vacantly into the blue. . . . The rubber planter from the interior, lithe and deeply burnt by the sun; or perhaps he is a tin-miner from the Kinta Valley. The officer from some ship in

port, his look drawn inevitably toward his blue mistress. The civil servant, pale in spite of the continual glare. The middle-aged army officer, immaculate, and flushed with too much drink. The British girl, super-poised, talking casually to a stiff young man in sports clothes. The usual foreign-looking woman, sitting alone, who might be a refugee from Vladivostock or some French officer's wife on her way out to Saïgon. . . . Singapore is the cross-roads of the world, where the blue currents of the North meet the green currents of the South; where East and West mingle in a confusion more cosmopolitan than New York. Ships of every nation lie mirrored in the harbor. Men from all lands meet beneath her palms, along her docks, amid her bazaars, in her great warehouses, her modern esplanades and native quarters. A minaret pricks the air; a temple squats in the fume of joss-sticks; tall spires touch the sky. A mongrel is Singapore; and her veins run with blood white and yellow, brown and black. . . . As I cool myself with an iced punch, I watch the people in the street; and I see proof of Singapore's promiscuity. Faces drift by in the heat like leaves on a slow current. Yellow faces from China and Burma; brown faces from India and

the Indies; black faces from Coromandel and Ceylon. Now and then an Arab in a red fez. Or a nearly naked fakir, white with ash. Or a veiled woman carried racing along in a rickshaw. I even see a big negro, blue-black, heavy-lipped, evidently from far Haiti or some other West Indian port. Innumerable sailors swing by with the slide of the sea in their gait. Beggars, thieves, adventurers. . . .

As the sun reaches the zenith, an eclipse-like light films the sky. It darkens swiftly, gathering in the east and racing forward, like a veil in the wind. The sea is gray, scarred with foam. A sudden coolness dissolves the heat. The dark veil swells, as though bellied by a gust of wind, then breaks in a deluge. The torrent bends the palm-trunks, floods the gutters. One can almost fancy a sigh of ecstasy from the thirsty soil. Coolies go racing past the veranda drawing hooded rickshaws; and the ships in the harbor are obliterated as by a cataract. Wet streets and drenching skies. There is nothing so depressing as rain in the tropics. . . . Then the shower passes. The heat shuts down, made more oppressive by an added dampness. Palm-fronds glisten with moisture that already is being sucked up by the intense rays. As if by

magic the sky has become a field of blazing blue furrowed with clouds. . . .

Not until late afternoon does the heat lift. I rise, drenched and irritable, from a nap. From my little veranda the harbor can be seen in a spread of mauve, the numerous ships lying at anchor reduced to a multitude of twinkling lights. In the limpid dusk, falling so swiftly upon the sultry day, the sudden stars seem to drip from the sky, like cold sweat purling from a glass bowl.

When I descend to the café, refreshed by a bath, the prospect is more inviting. Soft breezes and the strains of music. A night in Singapore! The idea is alluring. With morning I shall sail into the Gulf of Martaban and toward Burma, land of pagodas and kyoungs. Meanwhile, the evening is before me with extravagant possibilities. The suggestion of adventure causes me to order a bottle of Perrier Jouet. . . . Soft breezes and the strains of music. "Cielito Lindo"—a fragment from Cuba; a song of white walls and iron grilles, of dim patios and amorous sighs. . . . A night in Singapore. . . .

After dinner I set out in search of intrigue. The Perrier Jouet has given the night an added

luster. A half-moon sails overhead like a fairy fishing-craft and traps the sea in a net of silver. Beach Road plunges through the darkness toward . . . toward what? Who knows? But I shall soon find out.

Among the green palm-trees where the fireflies shine
Are the white tavern tables where the gallants dine,
Singing low Spanish songs like old mulled wine—

Those lines play through my mind, given added rhythm by the half-remembered tune of "Cielito Lindo." Palm-trees and white tavern tables; they are what I desire to make the evening more perfect. Suddenly I have an impulse to sing, and I wonder if it is the Perrier Jouet. "*. . . Ay, ay, ay, ay! Quanto y no yores! Por que quantando . . . cielito lindo . . . corazones . . .*" Now that I have done that, I feel enormously relieved.

A dim street wanders off from Beach Road—ending where? I follow it, passing blurred doorways where naked forms lie sleeping. Dogs prowl uncomfortably close to my heels. The gloom of the side street melts into a lighted thoroughfare. It is the magic Eastern street of fiction. Against flares of orange light move sheeted figures and bare-skinned men in turbans.

Rickshaw coolies trot past with the muffled *pad-pad* of unshod feet. Words in half the tongues of Asia float through the smoky glare, accompanied by the thromming of a drum. Pungent odors enrich the air.

I mingle with the reek and clamor, following that picturesque street until the lighted front of a theater draws me into its illumination. Strange, curling letters cover the bill-boards. The man in the box-office, a black fellow from Coromandel, volunteers the information that it is a Tamil theater, and that to-night the performance is "Nallathangal" from the "Mahabharata" and the "Ramayana." The queer lettering on the signs challenges me. I pay two Straits dollars and enter.

Dimness and dark faces. Above this mottled sea is the stage, brilliantly lighted. The actors and actresses, all Tamils (a people of southern India), have whitened their faces; and their costumes are gay-colored silks. As I enter, a large Indian woman with a diamond in her right nostril is addressing a young man of blanched countenance; and suddenly a drum and a harmonica begin a tuneless rhythm, and the two on the stage chant their lines to that weird accompaniment. What strange music! And how incredibly bar-

baric! It is India, land of mystery. A black Tamil slips into the seat beside me, and I recognize the man of the box-office. The lady on the stage, he tells me, is *Muliolankalee,* the sister-in-law of *Nallathangal. Muliolankalee* is a very wicked woman; she has forced her husband, the prince, to turn his sister, *Nallathangal,* out of the palace with her seven children. Very soon, he continues, *Nallathangal* will come to plead for food, and *Mulialankalee* will refuse it. Then *Nallathangal,* desperate, will drown herself and her children in a well. But in the end they will return to life, thus proving the power of Good over Evil. . . .

I sit through the performance, fascinated by the tuneless music of harmonica and drum. Afterward, the black Tamil, who is the proprietor, takes me behind the scenes and introduces me to the company. The wicked *Muliolankalee* has a really siren-like smile which she displays as she spits betel-juice with splendid unconcern.

Outside again, in the gauzy night, I retrace my way along the magic street. No white tavern tables or singing gallants have I found; and I feel disappointed, for the Perrier Jouet lingers in my blood. And such a night for comrade-

ship and low, blurred songs! A moon high overhead and stealthy winds! . . . Well, I shall go back to the Raffles and sit alone on the veranda over a glass of crushed ice and sparkling wine. . . .

I turn into a side street that I fancy is the one through which I passed before. The doorways are deserted, bathed in a wan diffusion of moonlight. A tomtom, somewhere in the ambient darkness, sends its persistent notes treading across the air. I hum "Cielito Lindo," trying to remember the words. . . . Then it happens, and happens so swiftly that I cannot recall details. I am aware, suddenly, that two men have come abreast of me, one on either side; and as I observe, in a flash, the strategic excellence of their positions, I anticipate what is about to happen. I cannot accept it as reality for several seconds; I know only that I am between two turbaned, naked men, each with a long flat gleam in his hand. A chilly emptiness flows into my limbs. . . . (Words in an unknown tongue; yet words that I understand.) This is preposterous, I tell myself; it is the sort of thing that one reads about in the newspapers. . . . Songs . . . white tavern tables. (My hands are lifted, and lithe fingers slip under my clothing, into my

pockets.) What a ridiculous situation! . . . Hell! Will they knock me in the head when they have finished. Or stick one of those knives into me? . . . An alley in Singapore. . . . "Cielito Lindo" . . . damned silly song. (The lithe hands have finished. More words in a foreign tongue; yet words strangely comprehensible to me!) I move forward. . . . This must be a dream! . . . Then the patter of running feet. I turn. The turbaned men are spinning through the darkness; and suddenly they disappear. Certainly I shall not pursue them. But what shall I do? Get a policeman! One usually does something of that sort when he has been robbed.

I break into a run. At Beach Road I pause, my throat throbbing, looking right and left. Coolies; a white man rolling along in a rickshaw. I start to hail him. But how silly, I reflect. What could I say? "I have been held up. . . ." Stupid. There is nothing to do but return to the hotel and there report the affair.

As I move off toward the Raffles, its lights glimmering ahead, I explore my pockets. Stripped.

White tavern tables where the gallants dine . . .

That flings through my mind. And I cannot help but smile. Adventure! At the Raffles a bottle of sparkling wine is waiting; and perhaps there will be some one on the veranda who will join me and hear my tale. . . . That persistent song keeps swinging through my memory:

Ay, ay, ay, ay! Quanto y no yores! Por que quantando . . .

EPISODE THE FIFTEENTH

A MAN IN SAFFRON

1

RANGOON. One of those names with a barbaric rhythm. In fancy, I see it as a gorgeous butterfly pinned to earth with a golden shaft. There is a sense of throbbing color, a soft richness as of velvet wings in its stretching roadways, its spacious parks and gardens, all gently undulating toward the pinnacle that burns on Theinguttara Hill—the Shwé Dagon Pagoda. Unmoved and immutable it stands on the crest of the city; has stood there for more than two thousand years; will stand there for a thousand years to come. All the world flows about it, white men to see and yellow men to worship; the butterfly Rangoon lies quivering beneath it; and its tall spire attains the heavens, even the Mystery beyond. For miles around it is visible; at dawn, a symbol of splendor; at midday, a lighted taper; at dusk, a gilded dream; at night, a lamp to the faithful. It is the Center of

the Universe, the Place of All Intelligence, the Pinnacle of Perfection.

I could see it from the gulf, below the mouth of the Rangoon River; at first, a gleam in the noonday glare as we lay, heat-stricken, waiting for the tide; then, as we glided upstream and evening closed in, a great gilded spider spinning dreams of twilight. I remember a last ruddy-gold flash of it just before we came to anchor; then it was lost in the pile of grayish crates, of tumbled roofs and groping smoke-stacks that is Rangoon.

A few fireflies pricked the dusk as I moved across the *maidan,* or park, that separates Strand Road from the waterfront. Vague figures slipped by in the semi-darkness—tall shrouded men with black faces, coolies turbaned and thigh-bound, and slender Burmans swaying past with graceful strides. A bell was ringing somewhere, faintly, and from the river came the blurred hum of shipping. Ahead, a white veranda soiled with shadows announced the hotel; lights glowed wistfully through the gloom. It was Burma as I wished it to be: sleepy dusks and soft-eyed natives; somewhere the sound of bells . . .

After dinner, I sat on the dark veranda, one

cigarette-end among numerous others. The soft clash of glasses, the thud of naked feet; random words. ". . . plays a corking game!" "Hey, dekko, boy! Do chota peg!" ". . . damned silly rot!" ". . . home on leave . . ." Tropical conversation, set to the hiss of a siphon and the clink of ice. . . . One hears hysterical reports about the amount of liquor consumed on and near the equator. Young men in novels invariably travel to the tropics to go to the devil. The Far East, the Malay Archipelago, and the South Seas, according to books, are the easiest places in which to become damned. In reality, it is just as easy to go to the devil in America or Europe or any other colder country. But, it must be admitted, it is not as attractive from an esthetic point of view. Palms and heat and blue water form an exquisite setting for the disintegration of a human being. But simply because the setting is appropriate for languorous sinning it does not necessarily follow that all men yield; moral fiber does not always fray in the tropics. But often the climate challenges out a lurking nature; and white men, arrogant even in their vices, find it agreeable to do a marathon to Hades in a place where their conscious superiority is not questioned, at least audibly. To "go na-

tive" is a dramatic expression; it looks well in a book, sounds excellent in a play. But comparatively few white men do. It would be infinitely more interesting if they did. (For, in spite of orthodox ideals and the Bible, one can be diverted by a picturesquely wicked person.) Instead, the majority sit on verandas and drink countless whisky-sodas, murmur banalities, achieve little, flirt with the decent women, and periodically satisfy their desires with a handsome Eurasian or native girl. The Curse of the Tropics is banality, not drink. . . .

As I sat there listening to the conventional symphony of voices and clinking ice, the pagan rhythm of a tomtom set the air to vibrating. The sounds came from the *maidan,* where lights and people mingled in a black and orange motley. Wailing in and out of the drum-beats, like wind among the rocks, were the slender notes of a flute. I knew that it was some sort of *pwè* or festival, and I forsook the tuneless plaint of Occidental voices for the more beguiling melody of Oriental music.

In the *maidan,* a troupe of Burmese dancers were performing against a hastily flung-up canvas curtain and in the glare of fuming gaslights. Among the watchers was a British sol-

dier, a tall bare-kneed chap in kilt and sporran. In the wavering light, his dress seemed as fantastic as the natives'. He grinned at me, and, encouraged, I moved nearer. Queer little devils, were n't they? he asked, indicating the dancers. I agreed that they were. The music had stopped now, and the dancers, fragile little creatures in vivid silks, were fanning themselves and chatting with the musicians. They had a charmingly naïve manner that suggested the women of Java. One especially, the *première danseuse,* judging by her manner, attracted me. Lithe hips were bound in a pale green and silver *tamein,* an oblong garment folded around the body and tucked in to open in the front and leave a little train behind. Her tight jacket was of velvet, and *dalizan* necklaces hung about her throat. Her skin was pale amber, her hands and ankles delicately formed. Pink flowers were caught in her glossy black *sa-don,* the rounded knot of hair such as all Burmese ladies wear. When I remarked upon her to my kilted acquaintance, he said that her name was Ma Khin, or Miss Lovable, and that she was quite a favorite in Rangoon.

Suddenly the music started. The instruments were three, a *pulwè,* or flute, a *patma,* or long

drum like the Indian tomtom, and *than-lwin,* or cymbals. One of the dancers, seated in the rear, commenced a recitative song. Miss Lovable opened her fan and struck a grotesque posture; then, twisting her wrists and ankles as if circular-jointed, she fluttered about the improvised stage like a drunken humming-bird. It was quite unlike the dancing of Java. Here was motion, expression, a combination of sinuous grace and quaint stiffness. Miss Lovable's face was impassive, yet her muscles twitched and leaped with amazing animation. These were not the vulgar muscle contortions of an Ouled Naïl or a hula-dancer; her motions were unreal, fantastic. They suggested fragility . . . a humming-bird, drunk, and frolicking in a gay paper lantern. Other coryphées, brilliant little figures in colored silks, joined in. Their gestures, their glances were whimsical, yet they were so grave, so utterly serious. In their capriciousness was a tiny solemn note. It made me think of the bell I had heard that afternoon. It was Burma; Burma in their dance, in the ring of the bell: a joyous little spirit, tragic in its abandon . . . a humming-bird, drunk with life. . . .

The young Scotch soldier asked if I were a tourist. This was rather flattering, as dwellers

in the tropics usually can classify without inquiring. Not a tourist, I replied, a traveler; for there is a fine discrimination between the words. Had I seen the pagoda? he continued. . . . The Shwé Dagon? No, I had only arrived that afternoon. Well, I must see it—and at night. (He glanced skyward.) The moon would be up soon. That was the time to see it, under the moon. (And I felt positive that, had he known me, he would have added that the fairies danced there then.) Perhaps he would go up to the pagoda with me now, I suggested. (And, I wanted to add, to see the fairies dance.) He grinned, a good-natured blond grin; why, yes . . .

We took a gharry and rattled through the glare and reek of the bazaars, past a lake that had a dark luster, and to the foot of Theinguttara Hill. Two leogryphs, done in white stone, guarded the entrance to the long hooded steps that sloped up to the pagoda. Above, rising from a blur of trees, was a tapering shimmer. We left our shoes and socks in the carriage; for it is forbidden, even to white men, to enter the pagoda shod or stockinged. The Shwé Dagon is, indeed, a holy spot—the only pagoda where the authentic relics of Buddha are kept. . . .

We climbed worn stone steps, built broad and low in order to make the ascent more difficult and thus force the pilgrims to approach in a manner fittingly slow. Overhead, a series of graduated roofs mounted with us, supported by tall pillars and cross-beams. Dim lights revealed stalls gaudy with *papier-mâché* toys, with colored prints of the life of Buddha, and other hideous and inappropriate merchandise. In shadowy recesses sat priests, yellow-robed and motionless, like carved figures of Gautama. Men and women lay asleep on rags, some pale with leprosy. Dogs prowled or sat and scratched themselves on the moist betel-stained steps. The filth made my skin crawl. I was disgusted, disillusioned. So this was the great pagoda that men crossed seas to look upon!

And then we reached the top, passed out into a vast flagged space—and through the door of Romance. Dim gold, the pallor of alabaster; blood-vermilion; lights; a pattern of palms; all swimming in aqueous gloom, like a sunken Atlantis. The utter barbarity of it smote me. As I paused in the entranceway, dazzled, the bewildering intricacy of design evolved definite figures. The mighty paya, or tapering dome, flung itself nearly four hundred feet into the air,

rising from the center of the platform like a half-formed, pointed bubble. Its covering of gold-leaf gave it the soft shimmer of hoar-frost. Around the plinth, on low terraces, were small chapels where images of Buddha sat in lighted shrines, protected by bars of metal. On the outer edges of the vast platform were innumerable slender-spired buildings; image-houses, chapels, shrines, and monasteries. Their up-tilting eaves, their graduated terraced roofs crawled through the tops of the palms into the very realm of the stars, as if pointing to the dizzy remoteness of an ideal. A tender wind came up from Rangoon, stealing over the parapet, between the fantastic roofs, and running its fingers through the palms. It tapped the little bells on the eaves and set them to singing. . . . Oh, those bells! How sweet and how mournful! Enchantment and disillusion. The voices of love and sorrow; the voices of young men fresh and laughing and old men heavy with dead dreams. . . . They filled me with a sense of inarticulate beauty, and, followed by the young Scot, I wandered over the flagstones, lost in poignant reflections. In countless recesses and niches, some dark and others pale with candle-light, were figures of Gautama; images of

marble, of alabaster, of wood and bronze, their gilding soiled by the smoke of holy tapers. The façades of chapels and shrines, inset with millions of particles of colored glass and brilliant tiling, glowed in the somber wall of darkness, and gave the illusion of intricate jeweled screens in a mammoth temple of black porphyry. A few worshipers were scattered over the terrace, burning candles before the shrines or bent low beneath figures of teak or alabaster. Faintly their orisons were carried across the platform, mingled with the sweet melancholy of the bells.

For some time we wandered in that maze of shrines, saying scarcely a word. At intervals a thromming ring destroyed the silence, followed by a sudden chanting from one of the monasteries. An illusive breath of incense lined the air. My acquaintance led the way through an avenue of stupas and palm-trunks to the broad parapet where we sat and smoked, our feet dangling over the monasteries below and our eyes upon the pulsing embers that were the city's lights. A yellow fan had opened on the horizon. It was a moon of enchantment. As it rose, an eclipse-like light flowed out of the darkness and over the city. It was like the wan glow that we have been told will forecast the end

of the world. For me it was the end of the world—the end of the world of Reality and the beginning of the immortality of Romance.

"Have you ever wanted to do something outrageous?" I asked my companion, challenged by the spell of the place.

Aye, he had, he replied with his faint Scotch accent.

"Well," I confessed, "I 'd like to sleep up here to-night."

"You 'd roll off probably," he shrugged practically.

"Then," I thought, "the jinnee of the pagoda would catch me!"

I had a goodly supply of cigarettes—Salonicas, with their rich, heavy flavor. We talked. He was a simple fellow, that kilted soldier; something of the soil was in his large knotty hands, something of the sun and wind in his red-tinged face and blond hair. Men of that type usually follow the sea, are a part of life's romance without knowing it. . . . He asked me about writing, childishly interested. He had n't read much; had n't had time. To him "style" meant smart clothes. He had once read a book by a man named Melville and liked it. Under its influence he ran away and went to sea.

Finally, when the war came, he joined on. Persia . . . then Egypt . . . then India. He expected to go home on leave soon, and then he would marry. I could see the girl—tall and straight and strong, and so very constant. . . .

But would n't he miss the East? I ventured.

No. He would be glad to get away from it.

But the color, the life . . .

Oh, London was much more lively! The East was a bit dull when you lived there. Karachi, Bombay, Rangoon, they were just like other towns with the exception of differences in appearance.

But those gorgeous harbours—Hong-Kong, for instance, I persisted.

He did n't care much for Hong-Kong. The sea-towns of the East were all alike; shipping, wharves, and a half-civilized city. They were just every-day life to him. . . .

More cigarettes. The moon rose higher, describing a half-arc across the sky and poising itself above the pinnacle of the pagoda. Behind us, in the grove of palms, the little bells were tinkling. . . . Something in the calm, in the exalted atmosphere challenged out figures from my memory. The girl on the hurricane-deck, she who had talked of Romance . . . Madame

Branch-of-Love, Aiko-san . . . Chang Yuan, the Beach-comber . . . Yes, I had found Romance. . . . Still the tinkle of bells from the palms; a drowsy fragrance in the air. . . . And the East had "got" me. Tropical air was in my blood, its corruption in my heart; the shiver of its hot winds, its fierce glare, the mystery of its silences; disillusion and enchantment; both had I known while youth was in me like wine.

Beyond the undulating shadows that were Rangoon lay a cord of silver, a cord that I knew went shining down to the gulf. The sight of it, so bright in the moonlight, filled me with restlessness. The Highlander, too, noticed it, for he said:

"It looks like a road."

"A bright blue road," I added. "Going where?"

"Home," he said simply.

"To strange cities, buried treasure, adventure," I corrected extravagantly.

He laughed. "If you believe that," he advised carelessly, "then follow it, and don't stop too long in any one place."

And suddenly, as he spoke, I had a brief prophetic picture . . . the roll of the Blue Road; and a pilgrim going on, in quest of a fabulous

Samarkand. . . . He had given me, without knowing it, a precious weapon against life.

2

Rangoon. A gorgeous butterfly pinned to the earth with a golden shaft. Mauve and black and saffron. . . . Roadways that weave like golden veins across a velvet wing, embroidering a sinuous pattern about the central design. . . . All streets in Rangoon seem to lead to the pagoda. They are runnels for a stream of life flowing from all the veins of Asia; drawn, it seems, by the bright pinnacle that stands like a lodestone at the heart of the city. The air is loaded with gold powder as a film of dust, illuminated by the sunlight, rises from the streets. Moving in this haze, like weird figures sunk deep in the ocean, are men baked by equatorial suns. Chinese, Malays, Shans, and other hillmen; a few Burmans, gay in silks of green, of pink, of cerise and amber, almost lost in the multitude of East-Indians, the latter dark-visaged men, sheeted in white or half naked, moving along with the stealthy purposeful air of the commercial intruder. Weaving through this loom, like threads of inexorable fate, are the poongies,

or Buddhist priests, in their saffron-yellow robes.

In the bazaars the butterfly's wings throb fiercely. Signs with crawling Burmese characters give an intricate touch to the gaunt houses, and against this background shifts a tremulous stream of color. A tall Indian woman, infinitely composed, with a brass jar on her head. A tiny Burmese girl, her *tamein* dragging and flowers in her hair, complacently smoking a huge cheroot as she swings by with the drowsy grace of her people. A coolie carrying a moist goatskin water-bag. A sleek Burman, in white jacket and blue *lungyi,* walking beneath a gaudy umbrella. Tailors sit cross-legged in their doorways; in the silver-market soft-eyed men squat, hammering elaborately designed pots. Dim shops breathe the mingled scents of sandalwood and joss-sticks. In these shops magic merchandise gleams on the shelves: gold and vermilion bowls like those at the pagoda; lacquered, glass-inset temple ornaments; tall palm-leaf fans, Shan bags and Burmese gongs. The silk stores are gaudy as a peacock's tail, filled with heavy, sheeny fabrics of lazuli and pale green and rust-gold and magenta. Here lithe-hipped girls flutter about, bargaining with the shopkeepers, and in the background, silent, grave, move the

poongies, pausing to examine a length of saffron cloth or to contemplate this display of worldly weakness.

Toward dusk Rangoon is a moth, not a butterfly. Her wings take on a soft depth of color, a gray tone that subtly brings out the glow of the inflamed sky. A gauzy coolness falls over the town. In the Cantonment white houses gleam through the dusky frondage; fireflies wander among the trailing bougainvillea and blossoming yellow trees that are so abundant. Motor-cars carry bareheaded, coolly attired Englishmen toward the Gymkhana and other clubs. Dalhousie Park sinks into diaphanous twilight, its lakes placid as a chain of mirrors. Across the sky glides a pattern of crows, cawing, screaming. . . . And then night falls, and Rangoon, the moth, metamorphoses into a bat, a heavy-winged creature with a thousand eyes.

3

He lived in a monastery to the north of the city, and he was a *yahanda,* that is to say, a very holy man. Pilgrims from all over Asia came to him for wisdom, to seek the Noble Eightfold

Way and the secret of the attainment of Ne'ban. I went. . . .

I set out in the early morning while it was still cool. Already the air was hung with a tawny film as carriages stirred the dust, and the natives were glazed with perspiration. I passed a lumber-yard where mottled gray monsters were dragging logs from a creek or tossing their trunks defiantly and trumpeting. Along the road walked poongies in their sad yellow robes, on their daily rounds to beg food from the laity.

The monastery was on the edge of town, in the midst of tall palmyra trees, tamarinds, and mangos, and the sunlight filtering through the lace-work of leaves created a luminous green pool in which the log-raised, quintuple-roofed building seemed to float like a strange undersea castle. Parrakeets twittered and wheeled among the palms; a few dogs lay drowsing by the gate. As I entered (the monastery was surrounded by a teak-wood fence), I hear a loud droning and, through the main doorway, saw a group of boys in yellow robes. Shins, or neophytes, reciting their lessons. . . . On the veranda a poongy greeted me with a smile. He could not understand English, and a young neo-

phyte, called from his lessons, went in quest of an interpreter, returning with a sleepy-eyed *saya,* or priest, who nodded response to my question and led me to the rear of the monastery inclosure.

The *yahanda* sat beneath a mango-tree, cross-legged, hands folded, just as Buddha is said to have rested in the shade of the Sacred Bo-tree twenty-three hundred years ago. His robe was of deepest saffron, and silk; at his side, on the grass, was a Talipat fan. He was old, how old I cannot say, yet the skin on his one bare shoulder and chest was smooth as polished rosewood. In strange contrast, his face was seamed parchment upon which a multitude of secrets were written in mystical tracery. His eyes were not narrow but wide, and smiled out from beneath a high, shaven skull. He had, instantly perceptible, a look of infinite composure. In coming into his vision, a vision friendly and understanding, I felt like a tired pilgrim entering the cool retreat of a temple.

He greeted me in the manner of a *saya* speaking to one of the laity, calling me *taga,* or supporter. . . . "May you be freed from the Three Calamities, the Four States of Punishment, the Five Enemies, and from harm of what kind

soever!" . . . The parrakeets flew about in the branches overhead, rustling the fronds, and the rasping of insects scarred the silence. From the ground rose a faint coolness, from the mango-tree a sleepy scent.

> I have been here before,
> But how, I do not know.

That darted through my mind as I sat down. . . .

"It is not often that white men come to me," he said simply.

"I have come to ask about certain things that always have seemed too complex for me to understand," I replied.

He smiled—not the cold, fugitive expression that steals over the face of an extreme ascetic, but a very normal smile.

"Cannot your ministers answer them?" he inquired thoughtfully.

"I have heard their answers," I said.

"They did not satisfy?"

"Too often they were sheathed in sectarianism."

His face was grave. I could sense that he was assorting words with care. Finally he pronounced:

"Christianity is like a seven-flame candlestick, each branch rising from the same foundation yet burning an individual flame. Men are simple at heart, and too many flames are confusing. . . . What do you wish to know, *taga?*"

"What is Nibbana?"

Again he was silent for a moment, assembling and choosing his words.

"Thus the Master defines Nirvana in the 'Dhammapada': 'If thyself thou art muted as a gong that is broken, thou art come into Nibbana, the perfect stilling of the voice of self-assertion.' Nibbana is not, as many believe, annihilation; it is the cessation of individualism. Nibbana is the quenching of Seit, the fire of passions; it is exemption from Utu, that is to say, from revolving years, from seasons, from the changes of heat and cold, darkness and light; it is the extinction of Khan, the soul of recurring existences; it is the death of Ahaya, or the senses; it is the end of all that we know and the beginning of all that we do not know. He who explains Nibbana beyond that point does so with the limited knowledge of his individual belief."

"And to attain Nibbana?" I pursued.

"All rivers run down to the sea, but some by a longer way. We of the Assembly follow the

Noble Eightfold Path which we believe is the surest means of perfect attainment. We obey the Se-ba-thela, or Ten Commandments. Thou shalt not take any life at all, is the first; thou shall not steal, the second; thou shalt not commit adultery, the third; thou shalt not lie, the fourth; thou shalt not drink intoxicating liquors, the fifth; the other five are confined to the conduct of the priesthood. Our daily life is very simple. Early in the morning, when there is light enough to see the veins in the hand, we are awakened by the sound of the *kadat,* or great bell. We rise, rinse our mouths and hands, and repeat precepts. When we have had our first meal we set forth on our daily rounds to the faithful. We may not eat after midday. In the afternoons, we teach the boys in the monastery schools. At sunset the *kadat* rings again. We spend the evening meditating or reading the 'Bitagat,' and then, about nine o'clock, we retire. . . . We do not believe in mutilation of the body, as do the Brahmans, but in the restriction of it. We eat food for nourishment and not to please the taste; we wear the yellow robe to cover nakedness, not for vanity; and we dwell in houses simply to protect our bodies from wind and rain. Our equipment is little: the *dugôt,* a piece of yellow cloth

which we fold and wear over the left shoulder; the *kowut,* another strip of yellow cloth which is wrapped around the thighs and extends to the ankles; the *thimbaing,* a yellow cloak that falls to the knees; the *thabeit,* or begging-bowl; the *kaban,* a leather girdle; the *pèkot,* a small ax used mainly for splitting fire-wood; the *at,* or needle; and the *yesit,* or strainer for filtering water. In return for giving up a life of fleshly pleasures we are rewarded with the Triple Consolation, perfect belief in the Lord, the Law, and the Assembly."

It was too severe to be acceptable to my loose temperament, and he must have sensed my lack of sympathy, for he said:

"We do not seek to proselyte by the example of our conduct, but simply to purify ourselves and make us fit to enter Nibbana. That our youths may know of this way and understand it, it is required of every Burmese boy to enter the poongy-kyoung, or monastery school, when he is eight or nine, but he stays no longer than he wishes, only long enough to attain what we call 'humanity.' During his period in the monastery he is a novice, a shin, and wears a yellow robe without becoming an actual member of the order."

He talked on—of mystical things that I did not comprehend, of metempsychosis, of the doctrine of Thera Vada. The parrakeets still played in the tree-tops, their feathers flashing green as cabochon emeralds. The rasping of the insects and the smell of the mangos made me sleepy. Yet I was alert mentally. My mind seemed to sift his words and allow a trickle, fine as sand, to fall into my thoughts and mix with the sediment of orthodox creeds, the ashes left by doctrines which my insolent imagination had burnt like paper in a flame. . . . Around me the trees were so green, the earth so warm, the air so silent, that I felt a satisfying sense of mingling with it all.

"You are a teller of tales"; thus spoke the *yahanda;* "then here is a story. Tell it to all who believe us idolators. . . . Some five hundred years before God manifested himself in the form of your Christ, there was born, in Nepal, a Prince. His people were of the Sakya tribe and ruled over a small territory in the Himalayas. His family name was Gautama, his own name Siddartha. . . . The Prince spent a normal boyhood and youth, and when he became of age he was married to a royal lady called Yasodhara. Meanwhile, a Deva, or Sacred Spirit, had ap-

peared to Siddartha's father and told him that his son would become a Buddha, and that there would be four signs which would cause him to forsake his kingdom for a life of holiness: an old man, a sick person, a corpse, and a wandering ascetic. . . . In due time these signs occurred. One day the Prince encountered an old man in the street, decrepit, ill-smelling, and in rags, and he contemplated: 'Are all men then, or is this man only, subject to age? . . . Shame, then, on life since the decay of everything is so notorious!' And then, later, in the pleasure-gardens of Kapilavastu, he came upon a man burning with fever, and he said: 'If health be frail as the substance of a dream, who then can take delight in joy and pleasure?' And, again, he saw a funeral cortège, and observed: 'Woe to such youth as is destroyed by age, and woe to the health that is destroyed by innumerable maladies! Would that sickness, age, and death might be forever bound! I must seek a way of deliverance.' And then the last sign appeared to him, a wandering ascetic, robed in yellow and carrying a begging-bowl; and the Prince, beholding him, said: 'Who is this man of so calm a temper? He makes me eager for the same course of life; to become religious has ever been

praised by the wise, and this shall be my refuge and the refuge of others and shall yield the fruit of life, and immortality!' And he dwelt upon these things at length and decided to accomplish the Great Renunciation.

"Now, on the very night that he was to depart, forsaking forever the pleasure life at Kapilavastu, there was born unto his wife a son, to be called Rahula. But this only strengthened his desire to find deliverance from decay and death. In the night he stole into Yasodhara's chamber for a last look at his wife and child, and then he rode forth on the steed Kanthaka into the forest of Uruwela. For six years he dwelt there in extreme privation while Mara, the Evil, and Indra, the Good, fought over him; and at the end of that time he came to understand that nothing was achieved by destruction of the body through such drastic asceticism. So he abandoned his hermit's cell in the wilderness and went down into the world. In the plains, at a place now called Gaya, he sat down to rest beneath a pipul-tree; and he fell into a trance, and in the first watch of the night he became conscious of his Former States of Being; then later he was possessed of the Omniscient Vision and the perfect understanding of the Chain of Causation, that is

to say, the origin of evil; and with dawn he attained the Supreme Enlightenment. He had become Buddha, the Enlightened One; and in later years men built a temple over the spot, taking care to preserve the Sacred Tree; and then other men destroyed the temple; and it was built again, torn down, rebuilt; and to-day it stands there with a legend over the door that reads, 'Mahabodhi, where Prince Sakya Sinha became Buddha . . .'

"After the Supreme Enlightenment, the Master spent the remainder of his life traveling the length and breadth of India, teaching his doctrine. In his eightieth year he died, at Kusinagara, in Oudh, beneath two tall sal-trees in the garden of the Malla princess. 'All things that are earth-born are perishable,' he said to his disciples; 'prepare yourselves for the imperishable.' That was his last sutra. After speaking he passed swiftly into Rapture, Insight, and the Higher Wisdom that is Nibbana. . . .

"And that, *taga,* is the story of a Man who walked the Aryan Eightfold Way."

While he talked he seemed to pluck away the rotted swathings of a mummy cased in my mind; and now, as he finished, the wasted remains lay bare before my gaze. It seemed to fill my nos-

trils with powder, with a smell as of crumbled bones and spiced cloth. There was only dust behind the sunken eyelids, behind the sewn mouth. . . . And in the same mausoleum of my imagination, side by side with the mummy, was a dark figure laid out in the orthodox habiliment of death; a body not half as old nor half as well preserved. My fancy quickly sculptured an illusion: the two forms in the tomb, and on the wall above them a barley legible fresco, illusive as breath on a window-pane—a frail impression of a Camel-Driver in the desert, of a Man in Saffron walking in humility with a begging-bowl, and of a white, anguished Figure on a Cross. Then the brief fantasy was gone, blown away like sand. . . .

Overhead, the parrakeets were still screeching in the branches, and the song of the insects filled the hush. The air was thick with the scent of mangos. It was approaching noon, and the heat came up from the warm earth, mingling with the shadows of the trees and melting them into a diaphanous green luminance. It inclosed all, the insects, the birds, the trees, like the tender breath of a mother. It inclosed the *yahanda,* too; and me. I was aware of what was to me a new friendliness in the soil, in the surrounding

warmth and greenness; for it came to me, suddenly, that we—the *yahanda* and I (and all men)—were a part of that soil, that warmth and greenness; and not merely a figurative part. I had a stabbing recollection of a tropical shower the day before, the sudden burst of rain that fell and was sucked in by the earth, only to ascend, an hour or two later, in visible rays of sunlight that transported it into the clouds again. . . . That very moisture gave life to the green things about me now, the insects, the birds, the trees. Gave life even to us earth-men; and we (all so splendid in our time!) rotted, like fruit left in the sun, and mingled with the soil, to perpetuate a future growth of earth-things in an amazing and ironic immortality. . . . Shifting dust-hills; and through them a wind played, just as the wind was playing in the palm-trees now—a distillation of some Universal Substance that filtered into earth and earth-men, and, when the law of action ceased, passed back into that all-pervading Substance, like mist melting through a wire screen. . . .

It was very old, that simple revelation that unfolded, there beneath the mango-tree; a truth that the men of Babylon must have known; that others surely dreamed in Nineveh and Tyre.

4

And out of all this wandering, this lingering in ancient cities, in jungle and in desert; over the burial-grounds of dead civilizations, among the ruins of others; in mosques, in temples and cathedrals; out of all these melancholy contradictions, that is the one thing of value that I have learned—the existence of a Oneness of Earth and Man, over which a Sublime Compassion casts an illusion of beauty.

EPISODE THE SIXTEENTH

THE BLUE ROAD

AND now my madrigal is ended. . . . I am home. (A strange word to me, home!) Scattered about me are treasures gathered in my wanderings. On the walls, hangings from Ind and Cathay; in the corners, shining gods (gods from Japan, from China, from Siam, from Cambodia, from Burma and from India); at my feet, rugs woven on the looms at Bokhara; and in my nostrils, the smell of the East. . . .

"Of course you will settle down now . . ."

From the street comes a muffled throb; to me, the drums of the surf pounding in blow-holes along some savage shore. It sends my fancy flying across the Pacific. A slim brown girl is dancing on the beach, before the footlights of the stars. Behind her the palms toss their feathery crests; the foam of the incoming tide weaves about her spinning toes; and at her side sits a ragged troubador, white, unshaven, playing on a fiddle. . .

"Young men who spend their youth roaming over the world never amount to anything."

From outside, borne on the silky breeze, comes the scent of Cape jasmine. It whirls me away in a fragrant cloud. This time I see a sun-steeped African town whose pale minarets prick the blue; and in a narrow blazing street walks the ragged fiddler. Above him rises a wall, mysterious, brutally white in the glare, like the palace-wall of an Eastern princess. And suddenly the fiddler pauses and lifts his bow. A flutter as of a wing above the wall, and at his feet falls a jasmine-flower. . . .

"The irresponsible man is always a failure because, no matter what his talents, no one will trust him with matters of importance."

A warm summer languor steals into the room; to me, the breath of the jungle. Before my eyes flows a scum-green river, coiling through the dank gloom of primeval vegetation. Suddenly the river widens into a marshy plain, and before me, on the far bank, wavering in the cruel sunlight, is a dead city. Tall conical towers taper from a writhing nest of vines; tremendous cloisters lie submerged in jungle; giant stairways fling themselves above the strangling green. On the walls, in deserted banquet-halls and tem-

ples, are the rotted manuscripts of the past: gray bas-reliefs that recount a thrilling history of battle and conquest, of triumph and downfall. And, at the heart of that dead city, stands the ragged troubador playing a laughing obligato to the gods who rule those ruins. . . .

"One can be a success only through orthodox living."

Through the windows I see the blue noonday sky; to me, not the blue of heaven but the blue of the sea. And the gray cloud that drifts by is a smart brigantine sailing under reefed canvas, with a wind on the quarter. I hear the purling onrush of foam by the bow, a whining in the rigging; and the blood in my veins seems to flow with these sounds. The tall mast tattoos the sky with stars. And above the fo'castle stands the ragged fiddler, violin tucked under his chin, bow in hand—a pagan unabashed, serenading the stars. . . . Beneath his feet the Blue Road rolls on toward strange islands lost in the starlight, toward heathen lands behind the moon. . . .

"And that 's my advice to you—settle down . . ."

Settle down! Yes, that 's good advice. . . . Oh, must you go? Well, good-by; and thank you. Good-by for some months to come. Do you see

those little gods, there in the corners? Well, there are other gods just like them, sitting in golden shrines, calling, calling. And I 'm going; do you understand? . . . And do you hear that bell? It 's in the church down the street—a Christian bell. But, to me, it has a pagan ring. It makes me remember the little bells on the eaves of the pagoda; the wind that comes stealing up from Rangoon, running its fingers through the palms, running its fingers through my hair. . . . Damn those little bells! Damn the heat and the stench and the lousy natives! . . . What? What do I expect to make of myself? Well, a pilgrim of the Blue Road. Out there, somewhere on a moon-lit beach, there 's a ragged fiddler waiting; and we 're going to be troubadors together. Or missionaries, if you prefer it. To the heathen? Yes, to the heathen, white, yellow, and brown, who don't see the exquisite poetry of the Blue Road. My doctrine? . . . God forbid that I should preach any doctrine but the doctrine of Beauty. . . . And so farewell . . . Angkor . . . Penang . . . Zanzibar.

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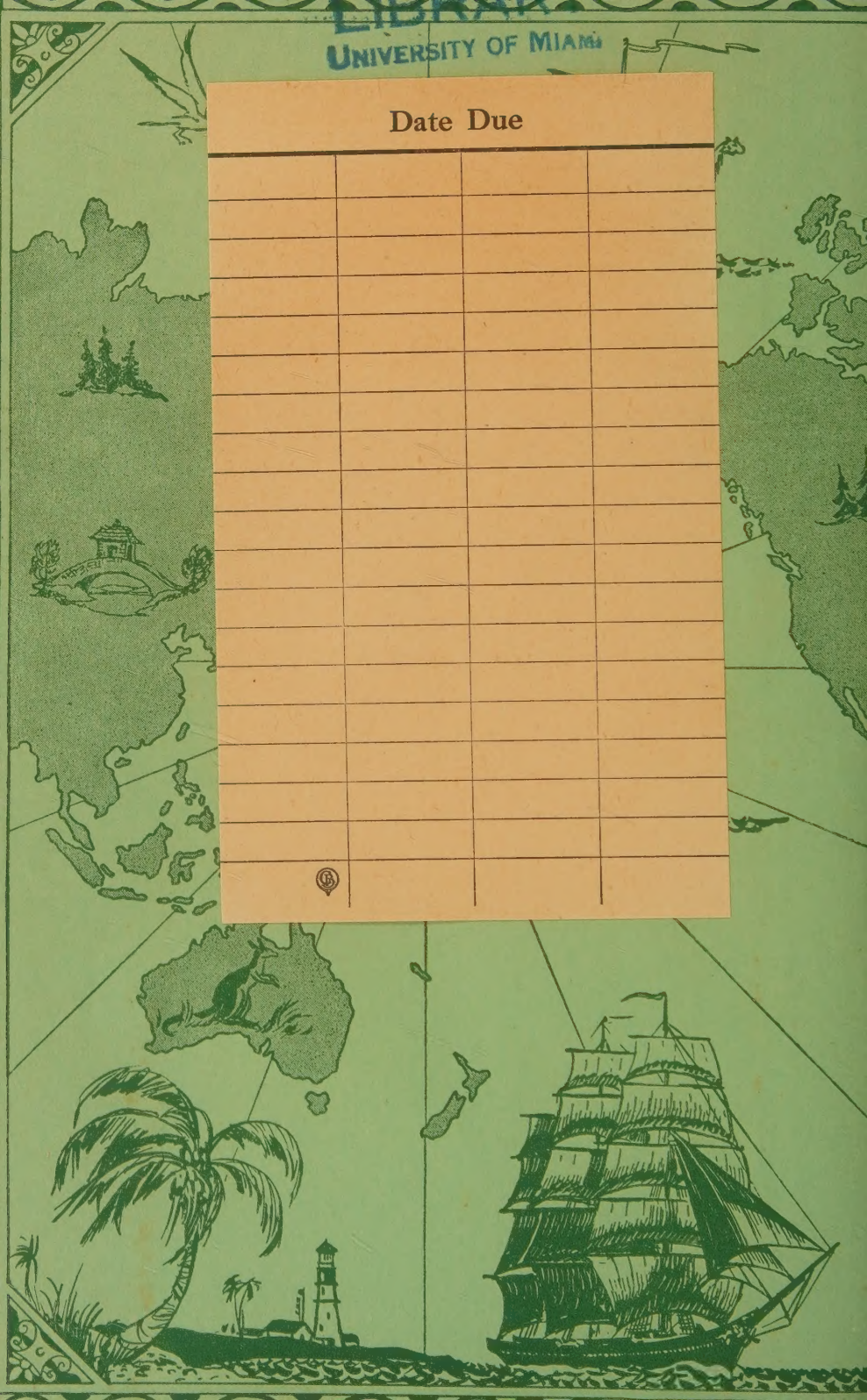

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